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THE NEW YORKER

JULY 24, 2023

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THE NEW YORKER

JULY 24, 2023

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Robert Pinsky (*Poem, p. 46*) will publish a new poetry collection, "Proverbs of Limbo," in 2024. His "PoemJazz" record of the same title is due out in September.

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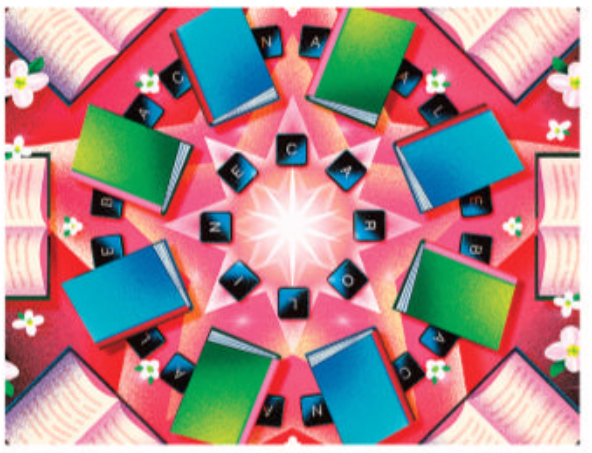
Tessa Hadley (*Fiction, p. 54*) published the collection "After the Funeral and Other Stories" earlier this month.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM



UNDER REVIEW

Tyler Foggatt on duelling memoirs by the Instagrammer Caroline Calloway and by her ghostwriter, Natalie Beach.

PERSONS OF INTEREST

E. Tammy Kim on Kim Hyesoon's poetry, a world of bloody dramas, dark orifices, and feminine rage.

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LEFT: ANA MIMINOSHVILI; RIGHT: JUNG MELMEL / COURTESY NEW DIRECTIONS

THE MAIL

REMEMBERING AN EDITOR

I was tickled by David Remnick's description of Robert Gottlieb, in his tender reminiscence, as "mindful of the anxious writer waiting by the telephone" (The Talk of the Town, June 26th). I was the exception that proved the rule. When I was a student at Princeton, Gottlieb's wife, the actress Maria Tucci, was a friend of a friend, and through this channel I passed along the manuscript for a novel I had written (one befitting a young man with more ambition than talent). Weeks of waiting turned into months. I acquired a literary agent, who insisted that we not approach anyone else until we heard from Gottlieb, and so eventually I called Gottlieb's office. He came right on the line and promised that he would call me back the next day. He was true to his word. When he rang, he confessed that, on the evening he received my manuscript, he had been determined to fix the wobble in his nightstand, and my pages had fit perfectly under one leg. I asked if he might not care to read my book, but he told me that, as much as he'd like to, the cat had peed on it. There are worse ways to learn that you have not written the Great American Novel, and, at the very least, I discovered that I had feline fans.

Dalton Delan
Potomac, Md.

PUSHING MEDICINE FORWARD

Gideon Lewis-Kraus's piece about A.L.S. patient advocates' influence on the drug-approval process led me to reflect on another demand that such groups often make, that more research be focussed solely on their own diseases ("Bitter Pill," June 26th). This is understandable, but it is also important to recognize that many of the most significant advances in medicine in the past century have come not from this kind of concentrated research but from curiosity-driven inquiry into broader areas. These developments include the discovery of the first effective antibiotics; the creation of recombinant-DNA technology, which has given rise to synthetic insulin and many other drugs; and the CRISPR-Cas9 revolution, which holds promise for treating a wide variety of ailments. We should of course fund research on individual diseases, but we should also reaffirm our commitment to basic research—not just because of the inherent value of the knowledge it produces but because, counterintuitive though it may seem, it is one of our most effective weapons in preventing and treating disease.

John Hanna
Associate Professor
Harvard Medical School
Newton Centre, Mass.

UNDERCOVER OPERATIONS

Patricia Marx, in her story about the Army Tactical Brassiere, the first bra designed for American soldiers, briefly mentions Maidenform, comparing the challenges of the A.T.B. design team to those of the bra company ("Show of Support," June 26th). Today, Maidenform may not have to consider the same demands that the A.T.B. team faces, but during the Second World War the company supplied the military with brassieres for servicewomen. (Our father, Ellis Rosenthal, worked for Maidenform from 1934 to 1977, and was one of the executives responsible for the production of these garments.) The company also provided other vital military gear: the tiny vests worn by trained pigeons that carried messages between headquarters and the front lines when there was no other way to communicate.

Kenneth Rosenthal
Amherst, Mass.
Joan Rosenthal
Vernon, Conn.

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

The Museum of Modern Art's **"New Photography 2023"** (through Sept. 16) marks the return, after a five-year hiatus, of a program that's been introducing cutting-edge image-makers since 1985. This iteration celebrates seven photographers connected to Lagos, Nigeria—including Karl Ohiri, who prints images (as above, from the ongoing series "The Archive of Becoming," which he began in 2015) from decomposing negatives he reclaims from the city's portrait studios, questioning the durability of memory, history, and self.

As ever, it's advisable to check in advance to confirm engagements.

THE THEATRE

The Doctor

In "The Doctor," the writer-director Robert Icke's loose, modernized adaptation of Arthur Schnitzler's "Professor Bernhardi," from 1912, Juliet Stevenson maintains a sense of matter under strain; her motive force sometimes manages to muscle the show forward, even when the wheels of logic are falling off. In the play, a Jewish doctor (Stevenson) refuses to allow a priest into a dying patient's room; the resulting public furor reveals widespread sexism, antisemitism, and anti-science bias. Icke tries to shoehorn this plot into a discussion of cancel culture, but his conflation of one type of threat with another doesn't work—violent antisemitism is worse than being criticized publicly. "Jesus didn't live in the digital age," the priest tells the doctor. She responds glibly, "We crucify them differently now." Icke does not argue in good faith, and he pelts his doctor with straw men: he has a Black activist try to get her to say the N-word on air, to prove that she's racist. What? Some clever staging choices, including casting actors who don't accord with their characters' identities, get lost in this argumentative din—but a sense of stung aggrievement comes through loud and clear.—*Helen Shaw (Reviewed in our issue of 7/3/23.) (Park Avenue Armory; through Aug. 19.)*

Malvolio

Last season, Allen Gilmore stole the show as Malvolio in the Classical Theatre of Harlem's "Twelfth Night," so it's a delight that the actor returns, in triumph, for a verse sequel by C.T.H.'s playwright-in-residence, Betty Shamieh. (Falstaff shouldn't be the only Shakespearean fool to get a spinoff.) Shamieh imagines a future in which Volina (Kineta Kunutu), Viola and Orsino's now grown daughter, encounters Malvolio, who has re-skilled, rather unbelievably, after a career as a butler, and become a major military general. High jinks ensue—their daffy king (the Tony Award nominee and comic juggernaut John-Andrew Morrison) and his lightly homicidal son (J. D. Mollison, also excellent) offer some narrative resistance to their happiness, but soon Volina falls, ickily, for the much older Malvolio. Despite all this romance, Shamieh seems to have lost touch with what makes Malvolio lovable (it's not his macho grit), so Gilmore's performance is hamstrung by more than just his cross-garters. Happily, C.T.H.'s candy-colored, dance-filled production, directed confidently by Ian Belknap and Ty Jones, encourages a funfair mood, crammed full with laughter and visual fireworks, and these overcome any sense of fizzle happening in the story itself.—*H.S. (Marcus Garvey Park; through July 29.)*

The Saviour

The first half of Deirdre Kinahan's seventy-minute two-hander, directed by Louise Lowe, is a monologue spoken by Máire Sullivan (Marie Mullen), mostly from her bed. It takes the form not of a prayer, exactly, but of a one-sided conversation with Jesus. Máire enjoys a cigarette and luxuriates in the afterglow of sex with Martin, a church companion and handyman, a surprising and wonderful development, she says, for a woman of her age. We also get hints of a brutal family life and childhood, and of the death of her husband, but over all the mood is gentle. That changes with the arrival of her son Mel (Jamie O'Neill). He brings revelations concerning his mother's lover, opening old familial wounds, and the play turns sharply in the direction of a bitter shouting match. A hodgepodge of Irish angst piles up—the outsized influence of the Church, the abuse of children in workhouses, pedophilia, prejudice against homosexuality. What's missing is eloquence, wit, and a coherent dramatic structure.—*Ken Marks (Irish Repertory Theatre; through Aug. 13.)*

DANCE

American Ballet Theatre

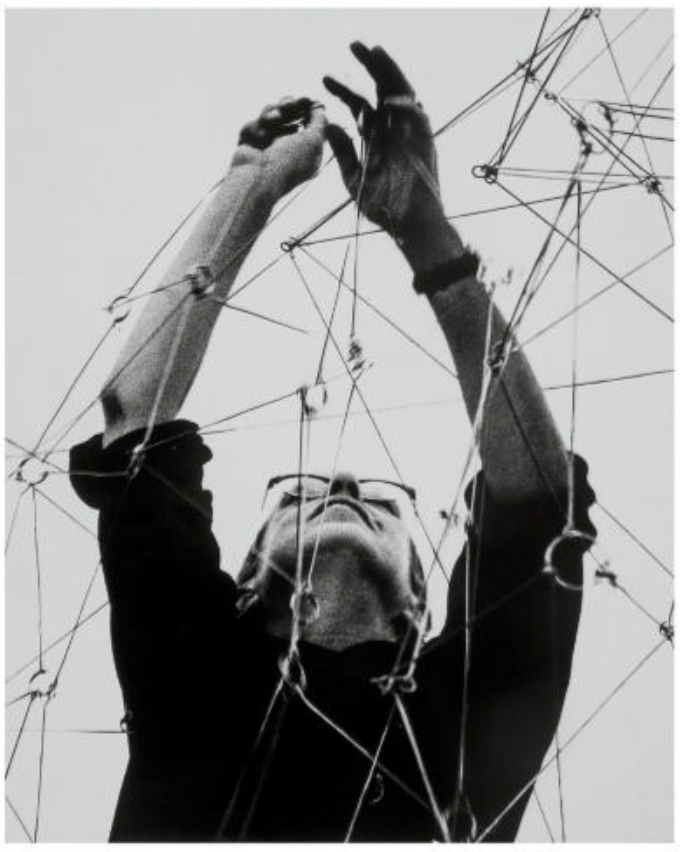
Ask almost any young ballerina and she will tell you that the role she most aspires to is Juliet in Shakespeare's tragedy. First love, a family feud, tragic mistakes—"Romeo and Juliet" has them all. There must be at least a dozen balletic versions, most of them set to Prokofiev's cinematic score, from the nineteen-thirties. The one performed by American Ballet Theatre, choreographed by Kenneth MacMillan, is probably the most popular, its reputation driven by its rapturous pas de deux and swashbuckling sword fights. This week, it returns to the Met—with no fewer than seven casts. Gillian Murphy (July 21), now in her twenty-seventh season, is a headlong Juliet, a girl-woman rushing toward her destiny; Catherine Hurlin, known in ballet circles as Hurricane, for her power and her speed, has her

ON TELEVISION

In the early nineteen-nineties, a serial killer, stalking the streets of New York City, murdered at least four men in a gruesome fashion, dismantling their bodies and leaving them on the side of rural highways. This news was dramatically underreported in the mainstream media because of the nature of the killer's victims: queer men, who had last been seen in and around gay bars in Manhattan. **"Last Call,"** HBO's new four-part docuseries, based on the book of the same name by the journalist Elon Green, attempts not only to resurface this lost history but to place it in a vivid cultural context that provides dignity and humanity to both the victims and the L.G.B.T.Q. activists who have fought for justice and an end to violence against queer people. Directed with great sensitivity by Anthony Caronna, the documentary is a remarkable work of empathy, something you don't often find in the typically exploitative true-crime genre. By nearly eliding the killer (the series does not linger on sordid details or psychological speculation) and, instead, centering the vibrant lives of the four known victims—Thomas Mulcahy, Peter Anderson, Anthony Marrero, and Michael Sakara—Caronna manages to tell a larger and far more dynamic story, about love, queerness, community, and jubilation in the face of constant danger. Rarely does a true-crime documentary concerning senseless deaths feel so essential, and so full of life.—*Rachel Syme*

OPPOSITE: KARL OHIRI / COURTESY THE ARTIST; RIGHT: ILLUSTRATION BY JASJYOT SINGH HANS

AT THE MUSEUMS



"Gego: Measuring Infinity" (at the Guggenheim Museum through Sept. 10) presents approximately two hundred works by this endlessly inventive artist, who aerated sculpture's givens—solidity, mass, volume—to produce dynamic meditations on line, light, and space. Born Gertrud Goldschmidt, in Germany, in 1912, Gego (as she called herself) immigrated to Venezuela in 1939, where she lived until her death, in 1994. Trained as an engineer and an architect, she created wire abstractions that look endoskeletal—as though in the midst of becoming, or un-becoming—and suspended them from the ceiling. She deployed squares and triangles as the building blocks, as it were, of her "Reticulárea" ("Reticular Typologies"; pictured above, being installed by the artist), the netlike work for which she is best known. Geometry, when wholly deferred to by an artist, can be soporific to the eye. Gego, however, interrupts the precision and intricacy of her forms, sometimes with a seemingly feral nylon string that snakes through a sculpture's center; other times, a shape suddenly shifts, then expands or proliferates. Evidence of her hand is everywhere—its discipline softened by its inevitable imperfections—but is perhaps nowhere more crowd-pleasing than in the "Dibujos sin papel" ("Drawings without paper"), which she began making in the mid-nineteen-seventies. Pinned to the walls, they play with, and inside, the two-dimensional, transmuting metal into scribbles, collected bits of hardware into symbols—her works' shadows at once proof of their materiality and of their seeming erasure.—*Jennifer Krasinski*

New York début at the July 19 matinée; Cassandra Trenary, a committed dancer-actress, steps into the role on the evening of July 22.—*Marina Harss (Metropolitan Opera House; July 18-22.)*

New York City Ballet

As it does every year, New York City Ballet takes up residence at a beautiful open-air amphitheatre in Saratoga Springs. The programs are mixed, with Balanchine relegated to a triple bill of classics that include his one-act précis of "Swan Lake," his fantastical "Firebird"—set to Stravinsky's lush score—and Jerome Robbins's Second World War-themed "Fancy Free" (July 21-22). Justin Peck's new, hour-long "Copland Dance Episodes," a youthful and luminous reverie set to three scores by Aaron Copland, gets two performances (July 20 and July 22). Another program (July 19-20) contains a collection of recent works by Kyle Abraham, Gianna Reisen, Christopher Wheeldon, and Justin Peck.—*M.H. (Saratoga Performing Arts Center, Saratoga Springs, N.Y.; July 18-22.)*

BAAND Together Dance Festival

What started, in 2021, as a return-to-performance special event, gathering together five of New York City's top dance companies, has become an annual tradition. For a free outdoor show, each of the groups—Ballet Hispánico, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre, American Ballet Theatre, New York City Ballet, and Dance Theatre of Harlem—presents a work, usually a crowd-pleaser, and members of several troupes collaborate on a pièce d'occasion. This year's collaboration is a duet by the former Ballet Hispánico member Pedro Ruiz. The repertory includes Justin Peck's "The Times Are Racing," Jerome Robbins's "Other Dances," and Ronald K. Brown's "Dancing Spirit."—*Brian Seibert (Lincoln Center; July 25-29.)*

"One Dance"

In a court ceremony performed at the Jongmyo shrine in Korea, rows of dancers move together in ritual slowness, wielding talismanic objects. "One Dance" takes that tradition and updates it—speeding and sprucing it up, shuffling the formations, incorporating the corporeal range and attack of contemporary dance—while maintaining the principle of unison. Directed by Kuho Jung and performed by Seoul Metropolitan Dance Theatre, the production finds a harmony between ancestral practice and modern-day spectacle.—*B.S. (David H. Koch Theatre; July 20-22.)*

ART

"Horses: The Death of a Rider"

This jewel of a show features sixteen paintings, made across five decades, by Giorgio de Chirico—meditations not on horses, per se, but on their symbolic heft. The story of Nietzsche's devastating encounter with an abused equine first moved de Chirico to take on the subject, in 1910. The philosopher's revelation: how immeasurably cruel humanity. Looking around this exhibition, one gets the feeling that de Chirico also painted horses because painters historically painted horses—and he was, above all, devoted to the classics. As ever, his compositions unbalance all sense of time, place, and scale. His beasts may stand in a single landscape, but they rarely share the same gravitational pull; they range from the muscularly modelled to the near-cartoonish, flat and funny. One of the show's revelations: "Battle at a Castle," from 1946, in which a mighty steed, mid-gallop in the foreground, stares directly at the viewer, while his rider surveys the bloodshed. Imagine the artist placing those delicate daubs of white to complete the horse's eyes—the animal now staring back at his creator—so that they might, for a moment, commiserate about the mad world of men.—*Jennifer Krasinski (Vito Schnabel; through July 29.)*

Doyle Lane

The ninety-eight "weed pots" on view by this Los Angeles-based ceramicist look like planets plucked from the cosmos and placed here for devotional study. Although many are teensy enough to fit in one's palm without the slightest wobble, each appears like a world unto its own. One reason: Lane, who died in 2002, at the age of seventy-eight, was a master glaze technician, conceiving and creating colors and surfaces that range from the celestial to the terrestrial—from crackling snowy whites and lustrous sky blues to fiery orange-reds that split apart like the desert floor. Lane reportedly designed his vessels to hold a single stem of dried greenery, and between 1960 and 1978 he made and sold hundreds of them. As Lee Whitten, a fellow-ceramicist,

JUAN SANTANA / © FUNDACIÓN GEGO

remembered his friend's sacred, prolific practice: "It was Doyle and the clay and the heat and the magic."—*J.K. (David Kordansky; through Aug. 4.)*

MUSIC

Billy Hart Quartet

JAZZ Drummers may be the iron men of jazz, playing with cunning, energy, and precision well into their golden years. Billy Hart, who is eighty-two, doesn't personify his namesake quartet like Art Blakey did his Jazz Messengers, but Hart's elegant percussion finesses every note expressed by his adroit younger compatriots—the pianist Ethan Iverson, the tenor saxophonist Mark Turner, and the bassist Ben Street. In a seven-decade career, Hart has mixed it up with all manner of mainstream and cutting-edge luminaries; his expertise marks the foursome as a thoroughly contemporary unit that acknowledges its place in the history of jazz. The group's two albums for the ECM label, "All Our Reasons" and "One Is the Other," come peppered with insider doffs of the hat, including Iverson's "Ohnedaruth" (an inversion of Coltrane's "Giant Steps") and Turner's "Lennie Groove" (a nod to Lennie Tristano). With Hart exhibiting the vigor and the resources of a man half his age, this is already a classic band.—*Steve Futterman (Village Vanguard; July 19-23.)*

Dither Plays Laurie Spiegel

EXPERIMENTAL Since its inception, in 2007, the intrepid electric-guitar quartet Dither has presented its driving minimalism on albums, including "Dither Plays Zorn," and in idiosyncratic renditions of experimental electronic classics. On many occasions, the group has expanded to a thirteen-guitar unit for live performances of Steve Reich's composition "Electric Counterpoint." But Dither returns to its four-piece configuration at the Sound Room, a part of this Gowanus vegan restaurant and night club, to reimagine "The Expanding Universe," an inquisitive album, from 1980, by the electronic composer and computer-music pioneer Laurie Spiegel. In 1977, one uncanny Spiegel composition, "Kepler's Harmony of the Worlds," was included on "The Sounds of Earth," an LP compilation that accompanied the Voyager spacecraft as it traversed the solar system. The earthbound Dither uses guitars and electronic modulation to interpret the work of a woman whose groundbreaking music has served as an ambassador for terrestrial life.—*Jenn Pelly (Public Records; July 22.)*

"Henri VIII"

OPERA The American Symphony Orchestra and its endlessly curious music director, Leon Botstein, last performed Saint-Saëns's "Henri VIII" in a concert at the Bard Music Festival, in 2012, and now it receives a full staging by the director Jean-Romain Vesperini. Returning on the heels of Broadway's "Six," in which Henry VIII's wives morph into twenty-first-century pop divas, Saint-Saëns's four-act work is a grand, dignified, gently roiling account of Catherine of Aragon's and Anne Boleyn's turbulent encounters with the British monarchy. Alfred Walker portrays the notoriously fickle king and Amanda Woodbury and Lindsay Ammann his first two brides; Botstein conducts.—*Oussama Zahr (Fisher Center; July 21 and July 23.)*

Kangding Ray

TECHNO The French-born Berliner Kangding Ray started out making ambient music, then began aiming his tracks at the techno dance floor. His dance tracks have the wide-screen sweep of head music, thanks in part to Ray's canny sound design—he sculpts each aural element himself, from the drums to the strings, before adding them to the arrangement. Although some electronic musicians futz with their sounds to the point of needless abstraction, Ray's distinctive percussion and pads are instantly personable, and his rhythm tracks have a depth and a weight that rival anyone else's in techno.—*Michaelangelo Matos (Basement; July 22.)*

Rema

AFROBEATS As West African pop music continues to expand in both its international scope and its sonic ambition, there are few more prominent young crossover artists than Rema. The Nigerian singer and rapper is the second coming of the swaggering lover boy Wizkid, with a similarly satiny voice, which Rema deploys more effectively. He first broke through, in 2019, with a trio of EPs that reimagined the traditional sounds of Africa, Afrobeat especially, transposed with the tumbling trap of the SoundCloud Internet. A few years spent ironing out the kinks produced the sublime "Rave & Roses," from 2022, a début album of music he dubbed Afrorave, fully synthesizing the genres he'd been tinkering with into something gently rhythmic and breezily groovy. The single "Calm Down" featured Selena Gomez in a remix, which soared up the *Billboard* Hot 100, seemingly anointing an heir apparent to Afro-pop's empty throne.—*Sheldon Pearce (Ford Amphitheatre at Coney Island Boardwalk; July 22.)*

Tamikrest

DESERT BLUES Taking its name from the Tamashek word for "unity," Tamikrest is a band that was born of the millennial enthusiasm, in the Sahara Desert, for blues guitar, which captured the attention of the nomadic Tuareg people, who crisscross the region from Burkina Faso to Libya. The band, formed in northeastern Mali, has been through a number of percussive incarnations since it was cofounded, in the mid-two-thousands, by Ousmane Ag Mossa, its singer and lead guitarist, but the current lineup, sometimes slimmed to as few as four pieces, is easily both its leanest and its most psychedelic.—*K. Leander Williams (Rockefeller Park; July 20.)*

ROCK

The intense U.K. psychedelic band Spaceman 3 broke apart in the early nineties, dispatching its two original members to other projects—Jason Pierce to founding the group Spiritualized and Peter Kember, whose musician handle is Sonic Boom, to his own outré recordings. As Kember's peers have fallen into a circuit involving lucrative reunions with sworn foes and full-album recitals, he has taken an intriguing path as a shadow figure, surfacing in the studio in aid of younger artists, including MGMT, Cheval Sombre, and Iceage. With **Panda Bear and Sonic Boom,** at Knockdown Center on July 21, Mr. Boom shares the bill with Mr. Bear, a member of Baltimore's Animal Collective. Both musicians have resettled in Portugal, and the duo's luminescent album, "Reset," from 2022, practically glows as it spins on the turntable; it's like hearing from a friend who's gushing about a move to sunny environs. Yet, within the lyrics, doom lurks: "Somethin' buried in the text," one line claims. "One dude's dead / And another's next."—*Jay Ruttenberg*

ILLUSTRATION BY CHRISTIAN LEON GUERRERO

MOVIES

Afire

A car breaks down at the outset of Christian Petzold's new film, and thereafter nothing goes right. All kinds of wrongnesses are here, from lightly comical misapprehension to devastating bad luck. The action is set in wooded flatlands close to the sea, in northern Germany, and, as is often the case with Petzold, the story displays traces of legend; the bearish and lumbering hero, Leon (Thomas Schubert), and his friend Felix (Langston Uibel) start off lost in a forest. Flames lick at its borders, and ash descends like snow. Leon hopes to write in a secluded house, but his plans are constantly thwarted—by Nadja (Paula Beer), who is already in residence, by the nightly noise of lovemaking, and by the arrival of a publisher (Matthias Brandt), who is clearly unmoved by Leon's work. The moral awkwardness of the setup, which is agony for Leon and no big deal for anyone else, is visible in Petzold's framing; the everyday ease of life is something that keeps happening in the half-distance, out of Leon's reach. Whether the movie earns, or requires, its ultimate swerve into darkness, near the end, is a question left hanging.—*Anthony Lane (In theatrical release.)*

The 15:17 to Paris

With wide-eyed wonder, Clint Eastwood tells the real-life story of three young American men who, in 2015, thwarted a terrorist attack aboard a train bound for Paris. His admiration and astonishment are embodied in his gonzo casting: the men—Spencer Stone, Anthony Sadler, and Alek Skarlatos—play themselves, and do so with lively earnestness. The attack takes only a few minutes of screen time; most of the film traces their friendship, starting in middle school, in Sacramento, in 2005, when the three boys, disdained and angry, bond—and obsessively play war. After some floundering, Spencer and Alek enter military service, and Anthony goes to college; yet all three remain casually defiant of rules, which is the secret to their ultimate success. They take a summer trip through Europe, visiting historical sites, and, as if they've been training for it, they make history. Eastwood's 2018 film (written by Dorothy Blyskal) is less a drama than a thesis about the traits that forge the trio's heroism. There's also a bit of politics—a view of social trends that foster or frustrate the men's best qualities—but it hardly figures into Eastwood's briskly ecstatic vision of the lives of secular saints.—*Richard Brody (Streaming on Prime Video, Google Play, and other services.)*

It Felt Like Love

Eliza Hittman's first feature, from 2013, brings tremulous intensity and vital insight to the story of a teen-ager's sexual awakening. Gina Piersanti offers a nuanced, yearning performance as Lila, a nerdy Brooklyn high schooler who's spending the summer hanging out at Coney Island and nearby playlands with her much cooler best friend, Chiara (Giovanna Salimeni), whose boyfriend, Patrick (Jesse Cordasco), is always around. Tantalized by the seeming ubiquity of sex, the virginal Lila passes from fantasy to the fumbling pursuit of Sammy (Ronen Rubinstein), an aggressive college student who toys with her. With a sure sense of place, Hittman moves the action from sidewalks and subways to marshlands suggestive of idylls and mysteries, and she lightly sketches Lila's complex bonds with her widowed father (Kevin Anthony Ryan) and the boy next door (Case Prime). The incisive and surprising dialogue, the quietly vulnerable acting, and Hittman's emotionally demanding way with the camera—pushing it close to the characters' skin, making their bodies the subject of the film—provide a bracing intimacy that renders fleeting moments strange, hallucinatory, and danger-fraught.—*R.B. (Streaming on Prime Video, Google Play, and other services.)*

Thomasine and Bushrod

In 1974, two years after making "Super Fly," the director Gordon Parks, Jr., infused this picaresque Western with a similar blend of cool swagger and social acuity. The action starts in 1911, in Texas, where Thomasine (Vonetta McGee), a sharpshooting bounty hunter, and H. P. Bushrod (Max Julien), a most-wanted outlaw, team up to rob banks. Distributing their pelf to the poor and disposing of murderous racists, they become living legends throughout the South—fictional Black forerunners of Bonnie and Clyde. Much of the movie (written by Julien) involves the lovers' gruff romance and practical difficulties on the run. Bushrod, an expert horseman, switches to early-model autos, giving rise to semi-comedic low-speed chases; the proud and temperamental Thomasine drolly schemes to join her partner on "Wanted" posters—and to get top billing. But the horrific landscape of lynchings and summary executions puts their impulsive energy and taut composure into fatal focus. When, during a shoot-out, Bushrod—in a majestic closeup—reloads his revolver, the whispered click of metal on metal resounds like righteous thunder.—*R.B. (Streaming on Prime Video, Apple TV, and other services.)*

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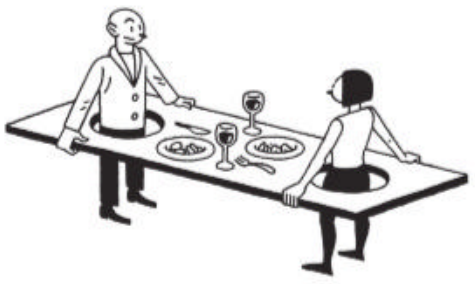
newyorker.com/goings-on-about-town

WHAT TO STREAM

COURTESY MUBI

Jacques Rivette's career-long exploration of the art and lives of stage actors reaches its emotional peak in the 1989 drama **"Gang of Four"** (streaming on MUBI, Prime Video, and other services). It's centered on four young women who share a house in the suburbs of Paris while attending the acting classes—in the city, and for women only—of a demanding teacher named Constance Dumas (Bulle Ogier). When a former roommate starts dating a suspect in a criminal case, the housemates attract the attention of a mysterious man (Benoît Régent) who insinuates himself into their lives in many guises, including detective and grifter. Meanwhile, the women bring their playful art of fabulation into their real lives and learn that real consequences result. Rivette also introduces a ghost subplot that evokes the fictional story's documentary-like essence; the entire film is haunted by the absence of the actress Pascale Ogier, Bulle's daughter, who died in 1984, at the age of twenty-five. (They starred together in Rivette's 1981 film, "Le Pont du Nord.") One of the titular roommates—who's searching for a missing relative—bears a resemblance to Pascale; Constance's monastic devotion to the young women in her course plays like a rite of mourning and commemoration.—*Richard Brody*



TABLES FOR TWO

Mabu Cafe

18 Doyers St.

If you're looking to impress a four-year-old, or a TikTok influencer (or, God forbid, a four-year-old TikTok influencer), have I got the restaurant, and the dish, for you! At Mabu Cafe, a new Hong Kong-style diner in Chinatown, you'll find a dessert that's served in a miniature bathtub. The bathtub itself is not edible, to the disappointment of my own four-year-old (who does not, as far as I know, have a TikTok account), nor is it yours to take home. But everything that goes in it is: an adorable, finely rendered Teddy bear, made of frozen coconut milk, and a colorful assortment of treats, including grass-jelly cubes, sago pearls, and taro balls. Give Teddy a soak in more coconut milk, poured from an accompanying pitcher, and enjoy.

The bathing bear is the tip of an iceberg of gimmicks at Mabu. For another dessert, white bunnies, made of firm, creamy milk pudding, are contained on a plate by a tiny plastic picket fence, with crushed peanuts playing the part of gravel. For a *tom yum goong* soup, crimped strands of instant ramen overflow dramatically out of a ceramic mug reminiscent of a Nissin Cup Noodles. "Get your camera ready!" I heard one woman urge another, as her phone pinged to let her know that she'd reached the top of the digital wait list, which tends to run long. When a server told me that the bathroom was "through the refrigerator," I thought he was joking. But there on the edge of the basement dining room was what appeared to be a pale-blue Smeg fridge, of a theme with the retro décor (shelves lined with old thermoses and typewriters) and the vintage Chinese soaps on TV. The Smeg door, which was covered in magnets, unlatched to reveal a toilet.

I've never been to Hong Kong, where the diner culture is legendary, but I get the feeling that anyone seeking the moving target known as authenticity from Mabu, which is an outpost of a Toronto restaurant, will be disappointed. One day at lunch, a couple at a neighboring table—residents of San Francisco who had spent time in Hong Kong—quibbled with certain aspects of one of the menu's cheesy baked bread bowls, which are stuffed with things such as creamy curry chicken or Bolognese, plus a choice of spaghetti, macaroni, or rice. Still, the restaurant is a good introduction to the general concept of Hong Kong's *cha chaan teng*, which translates literally to "tea restaurants." These offer, in addition to tea (and especially milk tea, which is exactly what it sounds like), what you might call mid-century Western cuisine modified for a Cantonese palate, a collision of sensibilities with some zany results.

The most delicious dishes I ate at Mabu fell pretty squarely on the Asian end of the spectrum: a bowl of chewy instant noodles topped with chicken, scallion oil, and a fried egg; sweet, sticky morsels of barbecued pork on a bed of lard-slicked rice; a neat stack of steamed *choy sum*, a Chinese-broccoli-adjacent green, in a glossy drizzle of oyster sauce; bouncy fish balls in a curry sauce. But I was charmed by the "Grills in Hot Plate" section of the menu, featuring sizzling cast-iron plates encircled by what look like soda-jerk-style paper crowns and piled with combinations such as a fried pork chop with sausage, macaroni, corn, grilled onion, and sliced tomato, and I was surprised by how much I enjoyed a comforting casserole of rice, beef, tomato, onion, and corn, blanketed in melted cheese.

If you're older than four, with no desire to go viral, instead of bears or bunnies for dessert, you might prefer a crackly-topped pineapple bun, sliced crosswise and stuffed with a scoop of vanilla ice cream or, better yet, a fat slab of butter. I myself went crazy for something called a Dirty Caramel Cookie Cream Bun: a soft, slightly crusty roll sandwiching gobs of luscious cookie-butter pastry cream and crushed Biscoff, then coated in more crushed Biscoff, wonderful and wacky. *(Dishes $6.99–$26.99.)*

—Hannah Goldfield

PHOTOGRAPH BY LUCIA BURICELLI FOR THE NEW YORKER; ILLUSTRATION BY JOOST SWARTE

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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
HIGHER AND HIGHER

In the list of ill-timed corporate announcements, historians may someday give pride of place to one made by Wael Sawan, the new C.E.O. of Shell, the largest energy company in Europe. In 2021, Shell said that it would reduce oil and gas production by one to two per cent a year up to 2030—a modest gesture in the direction of an energy transition. But Sawan, who assumed command of the company in January, signalled a different direction. The rise in oil and natural-gas prices, following the invasion of Ukraine, had doubled Shell's annual profits, to a record forty billion dollars. That windfall had an effect. While Shell remains committed to fighting climate change, Sawan told the BBC, cutting fossil-fuel production would actually be "dangerous and irresponsible," because doing so could cause the "cost of living" to start to "shoot up." (The company has also said that it already met the target it set in 2021 through asset sales, which would include the sale of various drilling sites to ConocoPhillips—a step that seems unlikely to fool the atmosphere.)

The BBC aired the interview on July 6th—the day that many scientists believe was the hottest so far in human history. Since 1979, a global network of satellites, ocean buoys, and land stations has been recording average daily temperatures, measured two metres above the ground, around the world. We're at the very start of what seems likely to be a major El Niño warming event; the previous global high temperature came at the height of the El Niño in 2016, when the average hit 16.92 degrees Celsius, or 62.45 degrees Fahrenheit. Estimates vary somewhat, but on July 3rd the average temperature reached 17.01 C, and three days later it hit 17.23 C, or 63.01 F. Scientists who calculate historic temperatures by examining proxy records, such as lake sediments or ice cores, believe that this may well be the hottest it's been on Earth since at least the peak of an era known as the Eemian, a hundred and twenty-five thousand years ago, when rising temperatures pushed mastodons north from present-day Texas to the Yukon. This would mean that nothing even remotely resembling a human civilization has ever known a world this hot.

To use Sawan's first adjective, that heat is clearly dangerous. The fires and

floods that have occurred in just these past weeks, all of them exacerbated by the heat, are too numerous to even begin to list here. If you're not in a place currently experiencing or recovering from some weather emergency, consider yourself lucky, and use the respite to make preparations for the inevitable. (There was something symbolic about last week's historic flooding in the Hudson Valley overwhelming West Point, the spiritual heart of what many might call the most powerful human force ever assembled.) The damage goes well beyond what you can capture in a cell-phone video: estimates indicate that at least forty per cent of the world's oceans are currently undergoing what biologists have dubbed "marine heat waves," doing systemic damage that we can only guess at; the temperature of the ocean, like that of the air, has never been higher in human history.

To use Sawan's other adjective, standing by as this warming happened is the most irresponsible thing that humans have ever done. In June, 1988, the NASA scientist James Hansen told Congress to expect more or less what we saw last week. Fossil-fuel companies were already aware of the risks, but they decided to deny the science of climate change through three decades, when we could have been doing preventative work. There's always been a reason for oil companies to stand in the way of action. At the moment, Sawan cites the risk of temporary inflation, and also the idea that, if we don't expand oil and gas production, children in the Global South—he mentioned Bangladesh and Pakistan

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOÃO FAZENDA

in particular—will have to study by "the light of candles."

But solar lights that can shine all night charged with just four hours of sunlight can be had for a dollar, and Bangladesh is a world leader in small-scale solar. In recent years, homes in that country that do not get their power from the national grid have relied on rooftop solar panels to cope with power cuts. As for Pakistan, last fall it had the worst flooding in at least a decade—the kind of sustained deluge that happens only on a heating planet where the air holds increased amounts of water vapor. It left a third of the country underwater, and, more than six months later, UNICEF estimated that twenty million Pakistanis in the flood zones, including nine million children, were still in need of humanitarian aid.

The Earth's temperature is going to go higher, no matter what we do: this month's all-time records will almost certainly be broken in the coming year, as the new El Niño gathers strength. Many scientists predict that we will at least temporarily pass the 1.5-degree-Celsius increase that nations vowed, in the Paris Climate Agreement, to try to avoid. But how much higher is still an open question: a rapid end to burning fossil fuel would arrest the heating; and that rapid end is possible, because solar and wind power and batteries to store it are now cheap and available. Texas got through an epic heat wave in the past few weeks largely because it has increased its solar and wind capacity, which kept air-conditioners running even as conventional power plants faltered.

But, in Texas, the Republican-led legislature spent much of the past year at work on laws that would discourage the use of renewables and prop up oil and gas. In Congress and on the campaign trail, the G.O.P. is expending far more energy in defending gas stoves than in doing anything about this growing crisis. So far, there's no real political penalty for that kind of reckless behavior. Indeed, Sawan told the BBC that, while there are not currently any plans, Shell wouldn't rule out moving its headquarters from the United Kingdom to the United States, where oil companies get higher market prices for their shares. (Britain has also implemented a windfall-profits tax on energy companies.) This suggested to him that the U.S. is more supportive of oil and gas companies, and, as he has told investors, he wants to "reward our shareholders today and far into the future."

That is pretty much the definition of "business as usual," and it's precisely what has generated this completely unprecedented heat. If the disasters we're seeing this month aren't enough to shake us out of that torpor, then the chances of our persevering for another hundred and twenty-five thousand years seem remote.

—Bill McKibben

HARM REDUCTION DEPT.

KNUCKLE TO NOSTRIL

A married couple were at a music festival in Queens the other day, explaining how to bring someone back from the dead. Their method: naloxone nasal spray, which is commonly called Narcan. "Just stick it up your nostril," Ingela Travers-Hayward, a former documentary producer, said, demonstrating on herself. "Then press in the plunger, and that's it." Narcan, which temporarily reverses an opioid overdose, recently became available without a prescription. Increasingly, party drugs and pharmaceuticals—Molly, meth, Adderall, cocaine, even CBD gummies—have been found laced with fentanyl, which is about fifty times stronger than heroin. Last year, more than seventy thousand people died from fentanyl overdoses. "I always say, 'Knuckles to nostril,'" Travers-Hayward's husband, William Perry, added. "It just gets it up in there! Then put the person on their side and immediately call for help."

Perry and Travers-Hayward, who were visiting from Columbus, Ohio, stood beside a framed photograph of their corgi, MarMar, who serves as mascot for their nonprofit, This Must Be the Place. A folding table was piled with naloxone kits; a sign read "ASK ME HOW TO REVERSE AN OVERDOSE." Perry, who is thirty-eight, wore beige Nike boots, cargo pants, a sideways Knicks ball cap, and a Mac Miller T-shirt. "I think it resonates," he said, of the shirt. "You know, this one hurt people a whole lot—Mac Miller passing away." (The musician died from a cocaine, alcohol, and fentanyl overdose at the age of twenty-six.)

Travers-Hayward, who is thirty-eight ("I'm so old and boring"), wore camo Nike Air Max sneakers and a black dress from Zara; her nails were an elaborate blue-and-gold chrome. "I'm using my hands constantly during the naloxone trainings, so the most important thing I do is make sure I have perfect nails," she said. "I'm past my partying age, but, when I was younger, did I love doing a line of coke at a party? Absolutely!"

Perry said, "I sold a lot of nitrous. I sold a whole lot of LSD, and a lot of Molly, too. That was the heyday of the Flaming Lips headlining festivals." In August, 2020, after a decade in prison, Perry was released from Pickaway Correctional Institution. "I got caught with a laptop and a stolen car, and I was using, and then I got caught with a nice amount of marijuana while I was inside," Perry went on. "I didn't get sober the day I got locked up, but eventually I stopped using when I was in there." He also took classes in social work and in substance-abuse counselling, and, in 2020, he fell in love with Travers-Hayward, whom he met when she was researching a documentary about men who were incarcerated during the pandemic.

She said, "I was interviewing him—"

"We were interviewing each other!" Perry interjected.

In March, 2022, the couple got married. "My parents were shocked," Travers-Hayward said, laughing. They started travelling around, handing out Narcan at music festivals. "We asked people, 'Have you ever known anyone who overdosed?,' and seventy-five per cent said yes," Travers-Hayward recalled. "That's the norm."

"They're walking into a buzz saw," Perry said. "We don't judge them, but it's, like, fentanyl is *gonna* be there when they go out and party." He went on, "My hokey line is 'We're like the gateway drug to harm reduction!'"

The festival gates opened at noon. Hundreds of people rushed past the Snapchat AR Photo Tower, through the Häagen-Dazs Mini Mart and the Bud Light Backyard, and toward the Gopuff

and Bacardi Stages, where Kim Petras, Ice Spice, Joey Bada$$, and Lil Uzi Vert would play. A few people also wandered by the Be the Place tent, where Perry shouted, "We're passing out free Narcan!"

The first visitors: an older couple (KN95 masks, lawn chair, Keen sandals), who paused, whispered to each other, and walked away. Then a youngish man (Billie Eilish T-shirt, Yeezys) approached. "I have no idea what you're talking about," he said.

"There are zero side effects," Perry explained. "You can't hurt someone by giving this to them. The F.D.A. says that, if you even think someone is overdosing, give it to them!"

"Oh, shit!," the young man said, grabbing a Narcan kit affixed to a blue lanyard.

Later, two recent high-school grads walked by. "I don't do hard drugs," one of them, Johnny Sullivan, said.

"No, no," his friend, Kaden Pilgrim, said. "It's to save someone else." The duo received a quick training on the signs of a fentanyl overdose.

"The symptoms are anything from a near-pass-out-drunk look to becoming unresponsive," Perry said. "In past times, you might say, 'Oh, they need to sleep it off.' That's actually the worst thing you can do."

Sullivan picked up a Narcan kit and said, "My uncle overdosed from cocaine on Christmas Eve." He paused, then added, "I was named after him."

At seven o'clock, Perry and Travers-Hayward headed into the crowd. A few young women danced as if the world were about to end. "One of my favorite things is just watching people have a good time," Perry said. "More than the bands, it's watching the people. They're having the time of their life!"

—Adam Iscoe

D.I.Y. DEPT.
SNIFF TEST

If you know what John Wilson's whole deal is, then you won't be surprised to learn that he was wandering around a sewage-treatment plant in Hoboken on a recent Friday, wearing a hard hat and a reflective safety vest and carrying a handheld camera. Wilson is the creator, the narrator, the main writer, and the principal cinematographer of "How To with John Wilson," a weirdly entrancing combination of dream-logic documentary and high-concept slapstick which is about to begin its third and final season on HBO. Taking his handheld camera to a sewage plant in Hoboken is a decent description of Wilson's day job, except when he's taking his camera to a plastic-slipcover store in Williamsburg, or to a referee-society dinner on Long Island. In "The White Lotus," implausibly beautiful people on glamorous beaches indulge in decadence and debauchery; in "How To," plausibly unglamorous New Yorkers figure out how to recycle their batteries.

Phil Reeve, a manager at the sewage plant, was giving Wilson a tour. "After the wastewater settles and is biologically treated, the effluence is clean," Reeve said. "You could drink it."

"I can?" Wilson said.

Reeve stopped walking. "You *could*," he said. "I wouldn't."

"Well, don't dangle it in front of me," Wilson said. They walked from building to building: Sludge Pump Station, Trickling Filter #3. Wilson stopped whenever something caught his eye—a bank of solar panels, a lone zucchini plant. (Reeve: "Seeds blow in here from wherever." Wilson: "Life finds a way.") Otherwise, Wilson kept moving, holding the camera at clavicle height and squinting into the viewfinder. "I can be a bit of a Mr. Magoo when I'm filming," he said. "Feel free to yell at me if I'm about to fall in a vat of acid or something."

Trailing behind him, wearing headphones and trying to stay out of the shot, were a boom-mike operator, a producer, and a couple of other crew members. "This is about as beefy as it ever gets, crew-wise," Wilson said. Between shots, he huddled with Michael Koman, a former writer for Conan O'Brien and Nathan Fielder and now one of Wilson's executive producers. "Ask more about what would happen if this place ever stopped functioning," Koman said. "Like, step by step." Wilson started rolling and asked the question. "Oh, it would be devastating," Reeve said. "The city would become uninhabitable within days. Maybe hours." Wilson turned and flashed Koman a thumbs-up. Other lines of questioning were not as fruitful. "Do you ever flush the toilet at home and think about how you'll just have to deal with it here later?" Wilson asked. "Nah, not really," Reeve said.

The tour ended, but Reeve seemed in no rush to wrap up. At one point, Wilson had expressed curiosity about how clogged sewer drains get unclogged. "Our guys are hydro-jetting one now, across town," Reeve said. "Wanna see?" If "How To" has an ethos, it's "When a guy invites you to watch a sewer drain get unclogged, you say yes." It was by taking people up on such spur-of-the-moment invitations, or by inviting himself to tag along, that Wilson ended up hopping on a party bus to Forest Hills and keeping a lonely spring-breaker company in Cancún. So, still rolling, he got in the front seat of Reeve's Ford Explorer. Having run out of sewer questions, he asked Reeve about his hobbies. "My thing is restoring classic cars," Reeve said.

John Wilson

"I've got an old Volvo from the eighties," Wilson said. Reeve didn't invite Wilson to his home garage, and Wilson didn't press. He watched the drain get unclogged, and then the crew loaded up two vans and headed back to the city.

"I know this episode is going to be called 'How to Find a Public Restroom,' but I still don't know what it's really about," Wilson said. The theme of an episode is mere narrative scaffolding (literally, in the case of the second episode, "How to Put Up Scaffolding"); the real revelations come from the impromptu

excursions and found objects and unforeseen connections along the way. "Today went pretty well," he said—he'd got what he needed, but no bolt-from-the-blue epiphanies. "If nothing else, shoots like this will prevent us from making a whole episode about public restrooms without actually, like, including a single bit of information about restrooms." The shoot took about six hours, including rush-hour traffic; less than two minutes of the footage would be used in the final cut.

"Gonna have to change before I go out to dinner," Koman said, sniffing his T-shirt. Wilson sniffed his own T-shirt and shrugged. "It didn't smell as bad as I expected, to be honest," he said. "That garbage plant in Sunset Park was much worse."

—*Andrew Marantz*

LEAVE-TAKING

A COP'S COP

A few days before Lieutenant William Sean O'Toole, the commander of the Bronx Homicide Squad, turned in his shield, ending four decades with the N.Y.P.D., he closed out the cold case of a young woman who had been beaten and strangled in 2002. Advances in DNA analysis had helped finally identify the probable killer. "He's our guy," O'Toole told the victim's family. But the preferred outcome—arrest, trial—would not happen. The perpetrator was dead.

After delivering this news, O'Toole returned to his office at "Fort Apache," a neo-Renaissance building on a South Bronx block that used to be, as the *Daily News* put it, a "poster child for urban decay." He walked by the deserted bullpen, the detectives' desks laced with gallows-humor mementos. (A children's book about dinosaurs called "All My Friends Are Dead.") The holding cells sat empty, as did the two-bunk-bed dormitory, which accommodates brutal shifts and sudden divorces. (O'Toole, long married, hosted an annual St. Patrick's Day feast for the squad, featuring food prepared by his wife, Marilyn.)

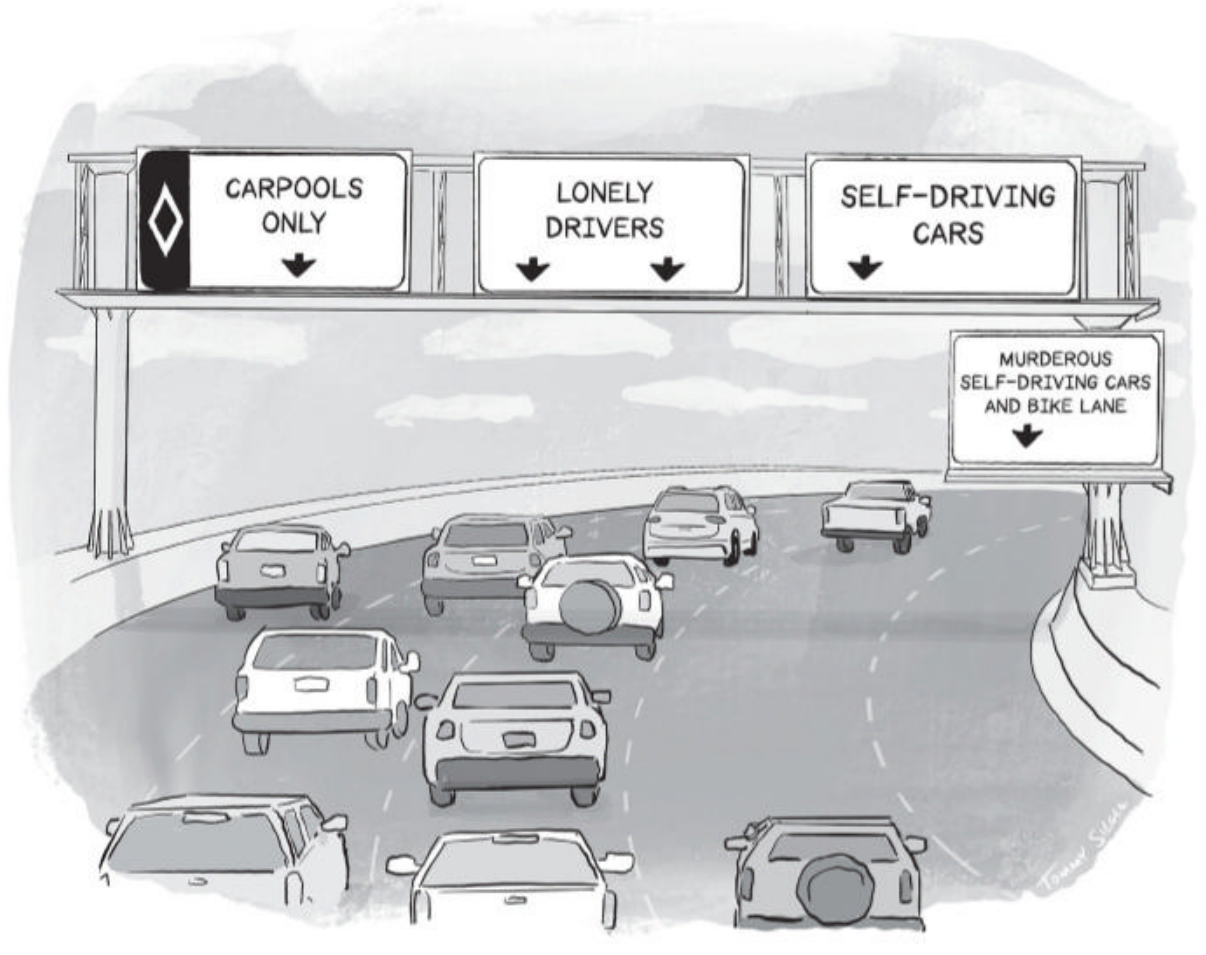
In his office, a collection of police-department mugs (Detroit, London) lay nestled in shreds of the *Times*. Years of cellular devices—Apple to BlackBerry to a flip phone the size of a shoe—awaited packing. On a display board was a roster of the twenty-one detectives whom O'Toole had chosen for Bronx Homicide—Cintron, Velez, Curran, Klein. He knew who was good in the box and who generated five pounds of paper before hitting the street. "The buffs are the guys you want," he said, meaning healthy obsessives. Under O'Toole, Bronx Homicide closed about seventy-five per cent of its cases.

O'Toole joined the N.Y.P.D. in 1980, a record year for homicides in New York—eighteen hundred and twenty-one people were killed. His unit often worked several homicides per night: "Go to one, triage, move to the next one." Violent crime later plummeted citywide, but the Bronx continued to see dozens more killings a year than Manhattan or Queens (yet dozens fewer than Brooklyn). O'Toole presided over more than five thousand homicide investigations.

The victims appeared in what he called "the book of souls," a handwritten ledger of the names of the dead, along with weapons, times, locations. William Chapel, Roberto Moore, Gina Giordana, Julio Sierra, Donnell Butler. Knife, gun, gun, gun, gun. Two in the morning; 8:41 at night. A third-floor hallway; beneath the Major Deegan.

In modern policing, few people hold command for as long as O'Toole did. He grew up in the Bronx, and his mind for detail makes him a valuable repository of case histories, starting with the death of Iris Curro, age three, struck by a bullet intended for her father. Bronx Homicide caught the shooter by using beepers and a pay phone. Then there were the killers extradited from Colombia in the slaying of a retired detective (2000), the ninety-two-year-old woman shot while cutting a peach (2009), the gang stabbing of Lesandro (Junior) Feliz-Guzman (2018). O'Toole's capacity for context provided rare insight: corner dynamics, family trees, how a perp who "went away" fifteen years ago was back, nursing grudges. "Lemme make a call" meant that he'd have the information within minutes.

The city's firefighters can work until the age of sixty-five; cops must be out by sixty-three. Days earlier, Keechant Sewell, the police commissioner, had unexpectedly stepped down after only eighteen months, reportedly because higher-ups wouldn't let her do her job. O'Toole had had the opposite experience. He was always allowed to choose his own team. O'Toole liked Mayor Eric Adams because when he showed up at crime scenes he shook everybody's hand and knew not to step on evidence, unlike Bill de Blasio, who, he said, was more likely to comment on the presence of mold. ("He



was better than a housing inspector.")

In the office, O'Toole waved hello and goodbye to Detective Brianna Constantino, who was working one of the unsolved cases that bothered him the most: newborn twins, wrapped in a wee-wee pad and a garbage bag and dumped like trash. Bronx Homicide gave the boys names—Zain and Zeke—and a proper burial.

Bagpipes are brought out for police funerals and also for walkaways, when a retiring commander exits his or her post. A few days later, O'Toole left Fort Apache at around two, wearing his dress blues, flanked by an honor guard. Colleagues crowded the barricaded street. Timothy McCormack, the deputy chief, tearfully said a few words, calling O'Toole "a cop's cop."

Thomas O. McLaughlin, a Bronx Homicide sergeant, held a police radio to a microphone and let the crowd listen as a dispatcher read O'Toole into retirement: "Thank you for your forty-three years of dedicated, honorable service to the New York City Police Department and to the citizens of New York City." O'Toole climbed into a cer-

emonial vehicle and was driven around the block. He had promised his detectives that he would always pick up the phone when they called. "I'm around," he said.

—Paige Williams

CAREER CHANGE
LET ME RAP

Given Hannibal Buress's track record, it wouldn't be unreasonable to suspect that his latest career move is an elaborate piece of performance art. The forty-year-old standup comedian and actor has spent the past two years forging a new path as a rapper and a producer. Last year, he released an eight-song EP under the stage name Eshu Tune. (The name Eshu comes from a Yoruban god known as a trickster.) His music ranges from the dense and introspective to the bluntly absurd, including a song called "Veneers," in which he pays tribute to his porcelain teeth.

Hannibal Buress

Buress was scheduled to perform his first full live set in New York recently, at the downtown club S.O.B.'s. Unusually, he raps with a full band and insists on rigorous rehearsals and sound checks. The evening of the show, he scrolled his iPad in the greenroom, searching for images to display on the stage screen during his act. "I love when the show has great visuals," he said, pulling up a retro-looking clip from a video game called Ninja Baseball Bat Man.

He has dabbled in hip-hop since college, when he did battle rap, and music has always been a topic in his standup. During the pandemic, part of which he spent in Hawaii, he seriously committed to the pursuit. He'd quit drinking after a 2017 run-in with the police, and in 2021 he was expecting his first child. "It was me realizing I wasn't excited about trying to do a lot of standup comedy the way I used to," he said in the greenroom. He wore a navy mesh Chicago Bulls jersey and slim black cargo pants. Sobriety has given him a fresh-faced glow and a newly svelte physique.

"I didn't want to be out there," he continued, referring to the comedy scene. "It just didn't feel good." Music refocussed him. He hired a band, a music publicist, and a vocal and performance coach, who helped him turn his onstage deadpan style into something more energetic. "One exercise she gave me was to imagine that the person in the front row is deaf," he said. "That helped."

At the start, he was stubborn about his new direction, routinely turning down six-figure standup gigs. "Fuck that! I'm doing music!" he bellowed, imitating himself. "Pass! No, I'm not doing your standup shit. Let me rap." Eventually, he realized that standup gigs could subsidize his music career and help him cultivate an audience. "It's almost like I have myself as a co-signer," he said.

The Eshu Tune show at S.O.B.'s was free, and, to mollify the old fans, he opened it with a standup set. "I used to do standup with passion and energy," he told the crowd. "Now this shit is just a warmup—so I'm not nervous when I'm doing my music."

There were plenty of laughs as he breezed through jokes about the rapper T.I.'s decision to try standup. "It's a tougher transition—taking beats away. Me doing music—I'm *adding* beats," he said. Throughout the set, a drunk woman in the audience kept interrupting. "You're so Hollywood!" she yelled.

"I'm Hollywood? Really?" he said. "Aw, man."

"We'll talk later!" she shouted.

"No, we won't," he replied, laughing. "Not at all. Absolutely not." The heckler kept at it.

Buress paced, searching for the right response. "This pause is not, like, 'Oh, I'm stuck and I can't come up with a joke,'" he said. He turned to the drunk woman. "But I'm genuinely baffled by why you won't shut the fuck up! What are you talking about?" The audience roared, and he returned to his bit. "*That* would have landed way better if you would have shut the fuck up!," he said, after he finished.

Frustrated but jovial, he told the crowd, "That's actually why I don't do that much standup. For real. There's a level of white entitlement in my audience, I promise you."

When he came out for his hip-hop set, he'd brightened up his outfit with a red satin bomber jacket and matching sunglasses. He performed a new single called "I Lift Weights," a wild and silly track that makes fun of fitness nuts. He prefaced it by saying, "This next track is a complete lie."

No heckling could be heard, and the audience loved it. What Buress had said at the end of his standup set was true: "When I do music, it drowns out your dumbness."

—Carrie Battan

THE POLITICAL SCENE

THE NEW BLUE WALL

How Gretchen Whitmer made Michigan a Democratic stronghold.

BY BENJAMIN WALLACE-WELLS

"I do think we built a different kind of coalition," Whitmer says.

PHOTOGRAPH BY PAOLA KUDACKI

When Gretchen Whitmer first emerged as the likely Democratic candidate for governor of Michigan, in late 2017, the mayor of Detroit, Mike Duggan, circulated a memo urging labor unions and Democrats to find a better-known figure to lead the ticket. Duggan wanted Senator Gary Peters to run; the United Auto Workers preferred Representative Dan Kildee. But neither member of Congress wanted anything to do with Lansing. Mark Bernstein, a politically connected Ann Arbor personal-injury lawyer, recalled that, while watching a University of Michigan basketball game at Duggan's house, the Mayor tried to persuade him to get in the race. By the end of the primary, Whitmer had outlasted the established alternatives, and went to Detroit to meet with the leaders of the U.A.W. ("Big talkers," a Whitmer insider called them.) The word was that the union and its allies were prepared to spend two million dollars on the election. "Let's ask them for $3.5 million," Whitmer told her campaign staff. "They're the last ones on board—what can they say?" At the meeting, according to an aide, the U.A.W. pledged to give her the whole bundle.

Lansing, like many state capitals, offers a politician real power without much prospect of fame. In small office buildings and well-worn restaurants, lobbyists and legislators shape and reshape the fate of the auto industry and, with it, much of the Midwest. Whitmer, who is fifty-one, has worked in the capital for nearly her entire adult life. She knows just about everyone in town and is married to a local dentist. ("Everyone loves him," a Republican lobbyist told me. "He's very funny.") Mark Burton, who was Whitmer's principal aide for more than a decade, said, "The Governor gives off a vibe. She's super relatable, and super likable, but also a little intimidating."

Burton recalled an episode from December, 2011, when Whitmer was the minority leader in the state senate, and getting just about anything done depended on her relationship with the Republican majority leader, Randy Richardville. Whitmer had spent years working on an anti-bullying law with the family of a fourteen-year-old boy in her district who had killed himself after an eighth-grade-graduation hazing ritual. The measure was set to pass, but, at the last moment, the Republicans, under pressure from the Catholic Church, added a clause exempting bullies who claimed a religious justification. Whitmer, as Burton told it, "said, essentially, this is bullshit." The following week, Whitmer appeared on the floor of the Senate, accompanied by a cartoon of Richardville holding a driver's license. Above the majority leader's face, it read "License to Bully." Stephen Colbert eventually picked up the story. The Republicans backed down.

Stunts like this might not have made it past Grand Rapids, except that Michigan appeared to be swinging radically to the right. In 2016, Donald Trump won the state, promising to bring back auto-industry jobs and denouncing free trade and faraway élites. His victory seemed to place Michigan at the center of a global turn toward populism and racist resentment. Whitmer had a different interpretation. "2016 was just a low voter turnout," she told me. "People were just, like, 'Government doesn't work.' They were cynical and mad and wanting to tune out." It wasn't that the industrial Midwest had fallen in love with Trump, in her view. It was that people didn't care enough to vote against him. Still, when a policy expert who briefed Whitmer at her home during the 2018 gubernatorial campaign asked why she was running, she replied, "Because I'm the only one

who can do it." That fall, she won handily.

During the pandemic, Trump attacked her for imposing long school and business closures. She endured an armed mob at the state capitol and a plot by a group linked to a right-wing militia to kidnap and kill her. Last November, Whitmer tied her candidacy to a state constitutional amendment guaranteeing the right to abortion and won reëlection by ten points, sweeping the suburbs so convincingly that the Democrats gained control of both houses of the Michigan legislature for the first time in forty years.

Since then, Whitmer's Democratic majority has allocated more than a billion dollars to support the auto industry's green transition; quintupled a tax credit for poor families; repealed a law that made Michigan a right-to-work state; and enacted new protections for L.G.B.T.Q. people. After a forty-three-year-old local man went on a shooting spree at Michigan State University, in February, killing three students, some modest, if hard-won, gun-control measures were put in place. "I don't know that we've ever watched the legislature go as quickly as they have," Maggie Pallone, a public-policy analyst in Lansing, said earlier this year, in an article in the Detroit *News*. Similar breakthroughs have come in Minnesota and Pennsylvania. What's happening in the Midwest, one of Whitmer's advisers told me, is a "Tea Party in reverse."

Whitmer's first ambition was to be an ESPN anchor, and she still has a sportscaster's instinct to inhabit a highly formal setting and then destabilize it with informality. She speaks briskly, avoids jargon, and runs ahead of schedule. David Axelrod, Barack Obama's senior adviser, who owns a house in Michigan, told me, "She's plainly smart, she's very agile. But there is a sense in which 'I might know a person like this.'" One afternoon in May, I watched Whitmer record a series of TikTok videos in her "ceremonial office," used for bill signings and photo shoots, which was decorated with portraits of past Michigan governors, many of them sporting muttonchops. Whitmer has wavy chestnut hair and a prominent chin that she dropped like a gavel at the start of each take. When she recorded a video wishing happy anniversary to the Ford Motor Company, a man in the room mentioned that his first car was a Ford Focus, which had been impounded for unpaid parking tickets. "I know so many young men who had their car impounded for parking tickets," Whitmer said. "Sorry if that sounds sexist. I don't know as many women."

At the height of the pandemic, the Detroit rapper Gmac Cash recorded an anthem titled "Big Gretch": "Throw the Buffs on her face 'cause that's Big Gretch/We ain't even 'bout to stress 'cause we got Big Gretch." Whitmer has expressed ambivalence about the nickname ("Certainly, no woman I know likes to be called big"), but it has come to capture what her supporters admire most about her: she is a Democrat who fights and wins in one of the most competitive parts of the country. "People think she's an intellectual, but she's not," Tommy Stallworth III, a veteran Detroit pol who is now a Whitmer senior adviser, said. "She is a wartime consigliere."

More broadly, Whitmer's wins suggest a different story of the Midwestern heartland, one dominated not by a political backlash in declining industrial cities but by a moderate liberalism in prosperous suburbs, where the Democrats have, for now, found the majorities and the money to stave off Trumpism. "Even I had my doubts over the last few years," Whitmer told me. "What is it going to be by the time I'm up for reëlection?" When I asked her what it has taken to be a successful politician during this period, she said, "It's an interesting combination of cold blood and genuine passion."

For most of the second half of the twentieth century, Michigan's politics were governed by a certain equilibrium. Long-tenured pro-union Democratic congressmen dominated in Washington. In Lansing, pro-business Republicans were the norm, personified by Mitt Romney's father, George, who turned a successful career as an auto executive into a stint as Michigan's governor, in the sixties. Whitmer came from a bipartisan political family. Her mother, Sherry, was a lawyer who would eventually work under the state's Democratic attorney general (and future governor) Jennifer Granholm, and her father, Dick, had served in the cabinet of Romney's Republican successor, William Milliken. In Whitmer's baby book, there is a press release: "Commerce Director and his wife have a baby, Gretchen Whitmer."

Whitmer's parents divorced when she was six years old, and she and her two younger siblings were raised mostly in the suburbs of Grand Rapids by their mother. Dick, based a couple of hours away, in Detroit, became the C.E.O. of Michigan Blue Cross Blue Shield. The family stayed relatively close. "My mom's mom used to call my dad the world's finest ex-husband," Whitmer's sister, Liz Whitmer Gereghty, told me. A lifelong friend of Whitmer's compared their upbringing to the teen-age raunch-com "American Pie," which was set nearby. "Everyone going out to Lake Michigan after the prom—it all felt very familiar," the friend said, then quickly added, "Far better behaved than that." (Whitmer offered a similar characterization: "My parents would tell you I was having way too much fun and should have had a lot more focus.")

Politics was not her main interest. "I played sports," she said. "But, more than that, I was kind of a rabid fan." She was working in the football office at M.S.U. when her father, then a prominent power broker, encouraged her to get an internship in the office of the Democratic leader in the Michigan House, whose chief of staff, Daniel J. Loepp, later became C.E.O. of Michigan Blue Cross Blue Shield. "She was like a sponge," Loepp told me recently. "I always knew she would eventually run for office." When a House seat opened up in East Lansing ahead of the 2000 election, Loepp urged Whitmer to run and helped her get the endorsement of a popular former state attorney general. She won by two hundred and eighty-one votes; it was her last truly close race. She was twenty-nine years old. "It's not that Gretchen Whitmer came out of the womb and said she was going to be governor of Michigan," Whitmer told me. "Every jump in my career, I've had that moment where I looked around and thought, Well, look who's out there. I could probably do a better job."

Even as a young legislator, Whitmer was no ideologue. East Lansing was affluent by Michigan's standards—with pretty neighborhoods surrounding the Michigan State campus—and, early on, she was unapologetic about defending the interests of her constituents. "In those years, a lot of Democrats were pushing to equalize education funding around the state," an aide of Whitmer's at the time told me. "But East Lansing was always

very well funded, and she would generally try to keep it that way." More often, Whitmer was a force for pragmatism: a former state legislative colleague recalled that, when many Democrats were trying to ban smoking in the state, Whitmer helped work out an exception for casinos, to keep the powerful gambling lobby on the sidelines.

On women's issues, though, she was uncompromising. In the two-thousands, she was the Democratic co-chair of a ballot initiative to protect stem-cell research in Michigan. "We needed someone who could talk about fetal tissue in a way that was honest and direct and not euphemistic," Burton said. "She was absolutely unflinching." One longtime progressive lobbyist in Lansing told me that she'd opposed Whitmer during her first primary: "I'd run into some first-time women candidates who think they're good on choice, and then you ask them the first question about partial birth and they collapse." A couple of years later, Whitmer, then pregnant with her first daughter, gave what the lobbyist called a "barnstorming speech on reproductive rights—no equivocating, no fucking around."

Whitmer's profile started to grow just as the Democrats' position in Michigan was eroding. Granholm spent her two terms as governor largely stymied by a Republican legislature; Democrats still refer to this as "the lost decade." The mayor of Detroit, a rising Democratic star named Kwame Kilpatrick, resigned in 2008 after pleading guilty to obstruction-of-justice charges, and a few years later the city filed for bankruptcy. By the Tea Party election of 2010, the dominant political force in the state was the billionaire DeVos family, of Grand Rapids, whose matriarch, Betsy DeVos, went on to serve as the U.S. Secretary of Education under President Trump. The gubernatorial election that year was a rout, won by an outsider Republican businessman named Rick Snyder, who campaigned with the budget-conscious slogan "One Tough Nerd." Quickly, Republican power consolidated: the Party was in charge of redistricting, and redrew election maps to cement its advantages in the state legislature and in Congress. It also moved to loosen campaign-finance laws. Robert McCann, who worked in Whitmer's state-senate office, recalled going through the Republican campaign-finance reports just after a G.O.P.-backed law raised the cap on individual donations, "and it was just a long row of twenty-thousand-dollar donations, all from people with the last name DeVos. And it was just, like, We don't have anything like that."

Snyder himself was not especially radical. He eventually spearheaded the state's passage of Medicaid expansion. When Republicans in the legislature proposed a right-to-work bill, which would allow workers in union shops to opt out of paying dues, Snyder initially opposed it. "Rick just felt there were higher priorities that weren't as divisive," Dennis Muchmore, who was Snyder's chief of staff, told me. "We thought it was an image thing." But, by 2012, the Republicans had a veto-proof majority in the state senate; when they passed the right-to-work bill, Snyder signed it.

A year earlier, Whitmer had become the Democratic leader in the state senate, where the Party held just twelve of thirty-six seats. Without any ability to affect legislation, Burton told me, the caucus could do little else than get Whitmer on television and have her attack. "Our entire strategy was to make her a star," he said. The breakthrough for Whitmer came in December, 2013, when Republicans were threatening to enact legislation that excluded abortion from bundled health plans, so that women would have to buy a separate policy covering the procedure. Whitmer called it "rape insurance."

As the bill was set to pass, she gave what is still the defining speech of her political career. It started with characteristic brutality: "Apparently, the holiday season of good will toward men reads more like *your* will toward women, as the Republican male majority continues to ignorantly and unnecessarily weigh in on important women's health issues that they know nothing about." But after a few minutes she made a turn. "I'm about to tell you something that I've not shared with many people in my life," she said. "Over twenty years ago, I was a victim of rape. And thank God it didn't result in a pregnancy, because I can't imagine going through what I went through and then having to consider what to do about an unwanted pregnancy. From an attacker."

Whitmer had guarded this story so closely that her staff didn't know it; neither did her father, whom she phoned right after she stepped off the Senate floor. "I was really in turmoil," Whitmer said of her decision to go public. Video of the speech went viral. Before long, Whitmer was appearing regularly on MSNBC, and became a national voice on reproductive rights. But, in Lansing, her speech didn't change a single Republican vote.

"Now that I've given up on dating, I have enough time and money to date again."

In the summer of 2017, the Michigan Republican Party conducted a pair of focus groups—one with Republicans from the wealthy suburbs of Oakland County who had not voted for Trump,

and the other with voters from working-class Macomb County who had backed Trump after voting twice for Obama. The groups represented the push and pull of partisan politics; a senior Party official at the time told me they were "probably the most interesting focus groups I've ever been a part of."

The results, the Republican official went on, suggested "two really crazy things." First, many of the Oakland County Republicans were seriously considering voting for a Democrat for governor in 2018. Trump "had completely alienated these voters, because of who he was as a person," the official told me. "The flip side was that the Macomb County people were not high-propensity voters. They typically voted only in Presidential elections. And they did not consider themselves Republicans." The Party had effectively traded away some of its most reliable voters for, as the official put it, "people who had lived rough lives." When the Macomb County group was asked whether they knew anyone who had died from an opioid addiction, half the participants raised their hands. "It was right then that I knew we were going to lose the next election," the Party official said. "Because we weren't going to get back our old people. And our new people weren't drawn to us—they were drawn to a single man, and he wasn't on the ballot."

The Republicans struggled to find a way to attack Whitmer, who had outmaneuvered a pair of Bernie Sanders-style progressives in the Democratic primary. The Snyder administration was ending disastrously, with the ongoing horror of the Flint water crisis, and Whitmer seemed relentlessly focussed on those suburban moderates who were sliding away from the G.O.P. (Her campaign slogan was "Fix the Damn Roads.") Eventually, the Republicans put out an ad repeating an attack that one of Whitmer's progressive opponents had made: that she was too cozy with Blue Cross Blue Shield, the state's largest insurer, whose C.E.O. was her old statehouse mentor Daniel J. Loepp and whose employees had donated more than a hundred and twenty thousand dollars to her campaign. Shortly after it ran, according to two state G.O.P. officials, Loepp called the Michigan Republican Party leadership to complain. At the time, Blue Cross Blue Shield sponsored a major policy conference on Mackinac Island, which attracted luminaries from both parties. Loepp denied making the call, but the ad never ran again.

Whitmer eventually won Oakland County by seventeen points, and, with it, the governorship. Her campaign had coincided with news of the Larry Nassar case, in which dozens of gymnasts came forward to say that the East Lansing doctor had abused them. Whitmer often told her aides at the time, "Women are angry." But the Republicans kept control of the legislature. In the first year of her term, they defeated an expansive education plan and a gas tax that Whitmer had wanted to fund her roads program. "We were struggling," a Whitmer aide said.

But the pandemic, which hit Detroit early and hard, reset Michigan's politics. Garlin Gilchrist, the lieutenant governor and a Motor City native, kept a tally of the people he personally knew who had died of COVID-19, which eventually came to twenty-seven. I asked him how the Whitmer administration had balanced suppressing the disease and keeping the economy and the schools afloat. He said that was a false choice: "People who are dead can't participate in economic activity."

Whitmer had made a similar calculation. The medical historians, she told me, had emphasized that in the last pandemic, the 1918-20 flu, children had died at disproportionately high rates. "I gotta tell you," she said, "all I could think about was: what if all the second to eighth graders were all of a sudden dying? Could I live with myself not having pulled the kids out of schools to keep them alive?" Whitmer issued nearly two hundred COVID-related emergency orders in 2020, and instituted one of the longest and most comprehensive lockdowns in the Midwest. Once the crisis receded, she admitted in a radio interview that, in many cases, her rules did not "make a lot of sense." But she defended the approach: "I think that deaths were the right north star."

Politically, Whitmer had developed an instinct for the tête-à-tête, which tended to both raise her profile and come at a cost. During a March, 2020, appearance on MSNBC, she'd pointedly criticized the Trump Administration's response to the pandemic, and soon the President was sneering at "that

woman from Michigan." (He also instructed Mike Pence, then the chair of the White House coronavirus task force, not to take her calls.) As resistance to her executive orders grew, especially in rural Michigan, gym owners and barbers who defied the law and stayed open became folk heroes; by April, 2020, it was common for lawmakers to find armed men surrounding the state capitol. "Every day, when I came to do my job," Gilchrist told me, "I had people standing along the sidewalks leading to the state capitol with guns raised, like I was going through a starting lineup at a basketball game."

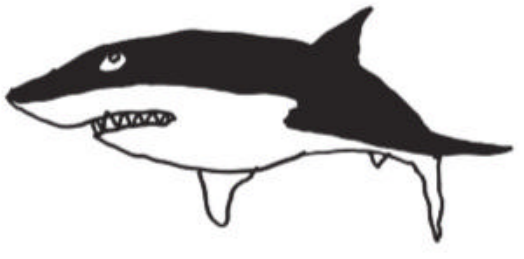
On April 30, 2020—eight months before the January 6th riot—armed protesters moved into the capitol in Lansing and gathered outside the doors of the House chamber, confronting the police who guarded the doors. Legislators could hear military boots in the hallways, and people chanting, "Let us in!" One representative recalled taking cover behind a colleague, who was a former cop and carried a gun. No one was injured, but, that October, the F.B.I. arrested thirteen militiamen affiliated with a group called the Wolverine Watchmen, who had conducted arms training and surveilled the Governor's official summer residence, on Mackinac Island, with plans to kidnap her and abandon her in a boat in the middle of Lake Michigan. Nine days after the arrests, Trump held a rally in Muskegon, where he denounced Whitmer and his crowd chanted, "Lock her up!"

In person, Whitmer is highly rehearsed but she also jokes often, sometimes to lighten the darker moments of her political career. During a recent lunch in her offices, on the third floor of the capitol, she maintained steady eye contact over a kale salad that she hardly touched. At her public events these days, the audience has to be vetted beforehand. Her husband recently retired from his dental practice because of threats against the Governor and her family. "I'm not as carefree as I used to be, in terms of walking into a big room of people," Whitmer told me. "I'm changed by it."

Reporters eventually discovered that at least one of the lead conspirators in the kidnapping plot had appeared that summer at a political event with the Republican majority leader of the state senate, Mike Shirkey, who, in a speech at Hillsdale College, the conservative Christian liberal-arts school, had said that Whitmer was on "the batshit-crazy spectrum." (Shirkey later suggested a willingness to fight the Governor on the capitol lawn and called the January 6th insurrection a "hoax.") Whitmer told me that on Shirkey's next birthday she sent him a cake decorated with a flying bat, to make light of the situation and to try to repair a relationship she needed. "Sometimes I want to be the mean cop," she said, "but I gotta be the good cop."

Conservative politics in Michigan is thick with temporary exiles and early retirees. Caught out by the turn toward MAGA-ism, they spend most of the year in Florida, work with corporate clients on political messaging, and pass around news articles about loopy things people do in Macomb County. ("Man charged with assault after hitting Warren store clerk with frozen fish," ran the headline on one I was forwarded.) In 2020, Snyder, who remains a Republican, said publicly that he would vote for Joe Biden. Few have faith that the Party as they knew it will return. One former state Party official told me that he held out hope that Peter Meijer, a moderate, wealthy former G.O.P. congressman from Grand Rapids, would run for the U.S. Senate next year, but, if he didn't, "it could be ten years or more until we're competitive in Michigan again. It just might need the passage of time."

One afternoon this spring, I drove to a biker bar in Cement City, in rural Hillsdale County, to meet with Susy Avery, a renowned fund-raiser who is close to the DeVoses and had been the state Republican Party chair under Snyder. ("We'll have some adult beverages," Avery had told me cheerily, over the phone.) When I arrived, she was in a corner booth, upbeat and effusive, nursing a Crown Royal and ginger ale. "This is not my first rodeo—I've lived through a lot," Avery said. "This time in Michigan politics is unlike anything I've ever seen. It's very challenging."



The challenge had to do with cash. As the rich suburbs had turned toward Whitmer, Avery went on, they had taken with them much of the state G.O.P.'s donor base, leaving the Party ever more dependent on a few billionaires and the business community, which Democrats were busy wooing with a sanity-and-stability pitch. Younger Republican candidates, Avery said, "are very good at social media, but you just cannot raise money on social media." In the 2022 cycle, this had led to an unusual situation in which the G.O.P. chairmanship in Michigan was shared by a wealthy real-estate developer from Ann Arbor named Ron Weiser, who had been George W. Bush's Ambassador to Slovakia, and a MAGA activist named Meshawn Maddock.

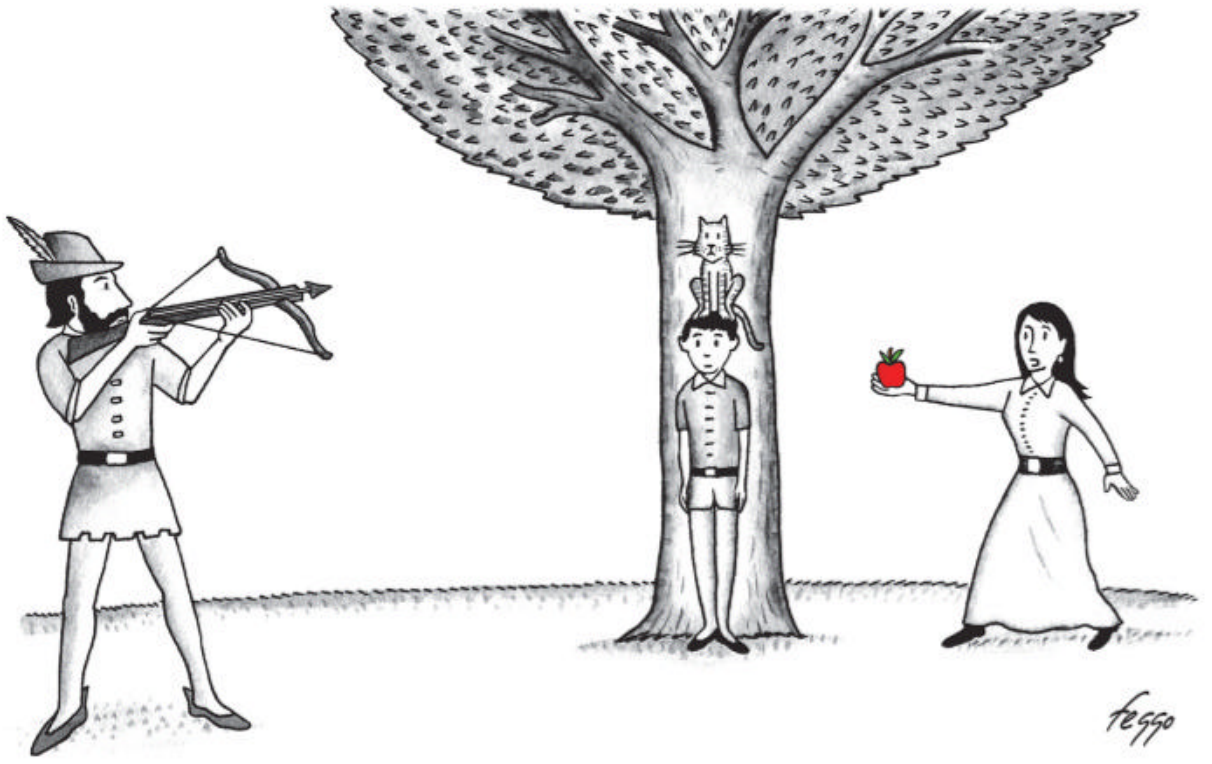
That was an obviously unstable pairing. The Republicans failed to gather enough signatures to get their top two choices on the gubernatorial ballot, and wound up nominating a conservative media personality named Tudor Dixon. After the Dobbs decision, Dixon was asked about a hypothetical case in which a fourteen-year-old victim of incest would not be able to get an abortion. She called this the "perfect example" of why it had been correct to overturn Roe; the statement soon became the centerpiece of an avalanche of pro-Whitmer ads. Some fact checkers in Michigan concluded that the Democrats had taken Dixon's quote out of context, but Whitmer saw an opportunity.

"I remember thinking, I can't believe this," Whitmer said. "For the first month after she won the primary, that's all we communicated on." Whitmer had been preparing for a post-Roe campaign since the night that Ruth Bader Ginsburg died, in September, 2020. Her administration had already sued to force the state Supreme Court to clarify whether a 1931 Michigan law banning abortion would go into effect if Roe were overturned. The court ruled that it would not, but the decision was open to appeal. In response, the Governor's liberal allies launched a campaign to include on the November ballot a question about establishing a state constitutional right to abor-

tion. Whitmer held roundtables across the state. "It was one of those things where we always said that the overwhelming majority of people support reproductive rights, but who's really polled it, right?" she said. Now, she went on, women were seated next to her, saying, " 'I've never voted for a Democrat, but I'm out knocking on doors for you.' " In the fall, the amendment passed by thirteen points, three more than Whitmer's own double-digit victory. Whitmer said, "I do think we built a different kind of coalition than Democrats have relied on before."

After the Republicans lost badly in the midterms, the two chairs resigned and were replaced by a right-wing grassroots activist, Kristina Karamo, who just months earlier had been rejected for a paid position as a canvasser over concerns about her podcast appearances, in which she argued that Beyoncé and yoga were satanic. ("And you should see her divorce filings," Whitmer said to me over a conference table in the capitol, raising her eyebrows; in 2014, during a car ride with her ex-husband, Karamo, in the passenger seat, allegedly reached for the wheel and yelled, "Fuck it, I'll kill us all!" Karamo has denied that this happened.) As the new head of the state Party, Karamo announced plans to shutter the long-time G.O.P. headquarters in Lansing and operate instead with only a post-office box in Grand Rapids. Avery and two other former chairs, as trustees, had to help close down the old headquarters, taking a long look around an emptied-out building that they no longer had anything to do with.

Some of the new talent on the Democratic side might, not long ago, have simply been Republicans. Angela Witwer, a sixty-year-old former marketing-firm owner, who now chairs the House Appropriations Committee, told me that when she first ran for office, in 2018, she interviewed with representatives of both parties. She picked the Democrats, she said, because they seemed more organized. "Also," she added, "they aren't crazy." Her district, in exurban Eaton County, is usually a tossup. "There is labor, but even labor is split, because they think we're all taking their guns away," she said. The suburban part of her district, she went on, "is educated, heavily female. And then I have a ton of farms and little tiny villages that are hanging out Confederate flags everywhere. 'Fuck Biden' flags are everywhere."



"Wait—I have a better idea!"

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In Lansing this spring, political power inverted. In the capitol's rotunda, bow-tied lobbyists still leaned on bannisters beseechingly, but it was Republicans who complained about backroom deals and the Democrats who kept delivering legislation. Conservative trackers—young operatives hoping to capture rival candidates in a gaffe—were already trailing Democratic legislators whose elections might be close. "My first guy looked like a murderer," Witwer said. It was a reminder that the current Democratic dominance might not last. The Party's majority hinges on keeping working-class seats in Macomb and Wayne Counties, which could easily flip in 2024, if Trump is on the ballot. This occasionally created tensions between Party stalwarts and newly elected progressive Democrats, who arrived in the statehouse with big plans, only to discover that they had to compromise to protect the Party's tentative hold on power. Witwer said, "They don't know what it's like to lose."

So far, though, the spectre of a Republican comeback has largely kept everyone in line. "It's such a huge part of what's happening right now," Christy McGillivray, a lobbyist in Lansing for the Sierra Club, told me. "Even when we talk about what's happening legislatively, no one wants to say bad things about the people who are holding off the fascist Christian takeover."

Avery had been serving as an elected Republican precinct delegate in Hillsdale County when the MAGA revolution came for her. A local pro-Trump faction moved against all the Party representatives who had opposed the former President's calls to overturn the results of the 2020 election. "They don't even really make a case," Avery said. "It's just RINO, RINO, RINO." Avery and other Republicans were declared ineligible for their posts, and replaced with an alternate slate of MAGA delegates to the state Party. To Avery, the implications were clear: the Party had decided to set itself on fire. But another lesson you could draw from her story was that the MAGA faction, like most effective insurgencies in American politics, was well organized at the local level and, therefore, not likely to simply go away. "I've been disavowed, censured," Avery told me at the biker bar, a little gleefully, thrusting her wrists out across the table. "Next step, stockades!"

Whitmer's official residence in the capital is a short drive from General Motors' Lansing Grand River assembly plant. Operations at the facility have been shrinking: the third shift was eliminated in 2017, and the Detroit *Free-Press* speculated in 2018 that the whole plant might shut down. During the pandemic,

Whitmer started to notice something new: rows and rows of cars produced in the plants—Cadillac CT5s and Chevy Camaros—were piling up outside. The vehicles, it turned out, were mostly complete but missing some components that were stuck overseas. Whitmer's vision, she told me, was of "a Michigan that is robust, that is innovative, that has population growth, that is solving the world's problems." That was not the situation unfolding in front of her.

The Harvard economist Ed Glaeser has observed that the modern economy has "been kind to idea-producing places, like New York and Boston, and devastating to goods-producing cities, like Cleveland and Detroit." Michigan is forty-ninth among the states in population growth during the past three decades. Whitmer's strategy for reversing the trend, which was the subject of her most recent annual policy speech on Mackinac Island ("an island without cars where people go to talk about the future," as one of her aides put it to me), has two parts: to grow, Michigan needs young people; to draw young people, it needs to have the social policies they want. Whitmer, whose elder daughter came out publicly as gay in the Washington *Post* last year, described this relationship to me in the context of how she pitched an expansion of L.G.B.T.Q. rights: "For a businessperson who may not have a family member who's part of the community, who maybe these protections are not personal for, it's pragmatic to say, 'This younger generation expects us to have these protections.'"

The goal seems to be to make Michigan an ideas-producing place again—one of Whitmer's initiatives is to use tuition grants to get sixty per cent of the state's adults post-secondary degrees by 2030—which, not incidentally, would also make it less like the states that supported Donald Trump. But Democrats are also trying to spark a second, goods-producing transformation in the Midwest, using the spending authorized in President Biden's Inflation Reduction Act to seed a new era of green manufacturing. In Michigan, the auto industry's conversion to electric vehicles is so ubiquitous as a political topic that it is commonly called, simply, the Transition. Whitmer's administration has helped underwrite a $3.5-billion Ford battery plant in Marshall and a two-billion-dollar battery plant in Big Rapids, both in conservative counties that Whitmer lost; together, the projects are expected to create nearly five thousand jobs. "We either win this decade or we are going to be catching up for a generation," Whitmer told me. "We have to be on the cutting edge."

No plan is as central to the ambitions of the Biden Democrats, in terms of both policy and politics, as the creation of a clean-energy economy. "Governor Whitmer uniquely understands that we can build an industrial commons here," Brian Deese, who was the director of Biden's National Economic Council, told me. "If we don't invest in the manufacturing processes to produce these technologies, then we wind up hollowing out that capability and having supply chains that are unacceptably reliant on China." But the Transition is also an effort to rebuild the "blue wall," the Democrats' stronghold on Midwestern states, which frustrated Republicans' Presidential hopes for two decades. Damon Silvers, the policy director and special counsel of the A.F.L.-C.I.O., said, "It is hard to overstate what is happening in Michigan, because, if electric-vehicle manufacturing is done union and is able to sustain middle-class families again, those families will vote for Biden, and then the U.S. stays in the Paris Agreement. And, if they don't, then you get some version of Trump again and it all falls apart."

Of course, such a program is susceptible to the same populist backlash that elevated Trump in the first place. Progressives have questioned the scale of the corporate handouts and also the quality of the jobs they're creating—the U.A.W. recently withheld its endorsement of President Biden because of concerns that wages in the new battery plants, typically between fifteen and twenty dollars an hour, would be too low. On the right, the line has been that the Democrats are trying to impose a future that many Americans don't want. "Who is the 'they' demanding E.V.s?" Andrew Beeler, the Republicans' assistant floor leader in the Michigan House, told me. "Because, if it's the free market, why do they need a subsidy from the federal government?" He called Whitmer "a poll-tested politician who knows where her bread is buttered, and that's unions and green energy, and she will not stray from that."

Whitmer, for her part, embraces the fact that her administration has close working relationships with corporations. A little slyly, she brought up Ron DeSantis, the Florida governor and Republican Presidential candidate, who has become embroiled in a yearlong standoff with Disney over his self-branded anti-woke policies. "I can't imagine General Motors taking a stance on just about anything where I would go to war with General Motors," Whitmer said. "It's just wild to me to see that Democrats are now viewed as a little more pragmatic and business-friendly than maybe some Republicans. But I think that's good. I think that's important. And I would consider myself in that vein."

The Democratic Party has had to adapt in Trump's wake. In subtle ways, its most prominent figures seem steelier than their counterparts a decade ago, with a clearer sense of the political center and a sharper eye for an advantageous political fight. They are also less adept at evoking a transformative sense of the future, and more politically dependent on conservatives alienating swing voters, a pattern that isn't sure to last. "The way I've always looked at it, man, is—it's all about power," Mark Burton told me. "How do you get more of it, how do you save it, how do you use it in the best way possible?" Whitmer, Burton went on, had developed a deep appreciation of this: "She understands power."

When I last spoke to Whitmer, just after the Fourth of July, she was, in a sense, at the height of her political influence: reporters had been coming to Michigan all spring to ask whether she'd run for President. ("I am not sitting in any room thinking about running for President," she told me, "and anytime that comes up it's a distraction.") But she also seemed attuned to the political uncertainties of the Biden era, and to how much the Party still needed to accomplish and how brief the moment might be in which to do it. "You know, what happens in these next few years is going to determine not just what the Michigan economy looks like but what American democracy looks like, what the average person in this country's rights are, what our confidence is in our institutions," she said. "Things are moving so fast right now. And, when you're moving fast, you can make a lot of progress or you can do a lot of damage." ♦

FUTURE INDIANA JONES SEQUELS

BY JAY MARTEL

SALLAH: I miss waking up every morning wondering what wonderful adventure the new day will bring to us.

INDIANA: Those days have come and gone.

SALLAH: Perhaps, perhaps not.

INDIANA: I don't believe in magic . . . but a few times in my life I've seen things . . . things I can't explain.

—From the trailer for "Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny."

SALLAH: Indy, there's an ancient scroll you need to see.

INDIANA: I've told you a million times, I'm retired.

SALLAH: Perhaps, perhaps not.

INDIANA: Look, I've seen things, strange things, inside caves, mostly, but that doesn't mean I have to start missing meals every time you show up with a scroll. Now, where are my damn reading glasses?

—"Indiana Jones and the Pill Counter of Predetermination"

SALLAH: Indy, you know I wouldn't be coming to you if it wasn't important.

INDIANA: Sallah, look at us! We're both so old we can barely walk, much less figure out how to find a priceless ancient object.

SALLAH: I know, Indy. But the ancient mysteries—they are still out there waiting for us!

INDIANA: O.K., O.K. Just help me up.

SALLAH: I'm not sure I can.

INDIANA: Here, hold on to one end of this bullwhip.

SALLAH: Really?

INDIANA: I don't know. I'm making this up as I go.

—"Indiana Jones and the Catheter of Chaos"

SALLAH: I swear this is the last time I'll ask . . .

INDIANA: We've already had this conversation. I'm pretty sure. Wait. Have we?

SALLAH: We've had similar conversations.

INDIANA: Ha. I knew it.

SALLAH: But, Indy, I really think this is something you'll want to investigate.

INDIANA: Look, I've seen a few Nazis vaporized in my time, but maybe they deserved it? I mean, they were Nazis. . . . I'm sorry, what were we talking about?

SALLAH: I don't remember.

—"Indiana Jones and the Bed of Bewilderment"

SALLAH: Indy, I really need your help with this.

INDIANA: I told you, I'm retired! I'm out of the game!

SALLAH: But they took my driver's license away after I pressed down on the gas pedal instead of the brake, and now I need a ride to the all-night pharmacy.

INDIANA: Start the engine!

—"Indiana Jones and the Final Errand"

SALLAH: Indy, an amulet has gone missing . . .

INDIANA: Who the hell are you?

SALLAH: Your sidekick.

INDIANA: Short Round?

SALLAH: You're having a bad day. Maybe it's better if I come back another time.

INDIANA: Marion?

SALLAH: Oh, boy.

—"Indiana Jones and the Elusive Name" ♦

LUCI GUTIÉRREZ

ANNALS OF MEDICINE

SUBTLE REVOLUTION

In the treatment of M.S., small steps add up to a new approach to disease.

BY RIVKA GALCHEN

Saud Sadiq's center integrates research and patient care in a single building.

In 2014, Erin Storch looked in the mirror and felt as if she were drifting leftward. It was a feeling she didn't know how to fully describe. She had been on maternity leave, and had recently returned to her job at a hospital consultancy in Washington, D.C. Storch had been promoted while on leave, so she was learning something new at work—and it seemed strangely difficult to absorb the information. She was also pumping milk three times a day. People suggested that what she was experiencing might be profound exhaustion; she disagreed. "I knew in my gut that the way I was feeling was not within the spectrum of what you would consider normal," she said.

There were further unsettling sensations: "Coffee tasted like water. The left side of my body was weak and numb." Storch went to see her ob-gyn, who sent her for a CT scan. Nothing unusual showed up.

Storch's son was six months old when her symptoms manifested. When he was seven and a half months old, she walked down the stairs while holding him, and fell. Her son was O.K. "But then I knew that something was really wrong," she said. She found a new doctor, who sat with her and her husband "for maybe forty minutes. It was just a conversation—there wasn't even a physical exam. He said to me that he knew a lot of moms with demanding careers and that this was not that." She started to cry from the relief of being believed. He scheduled an MRI for that evening. "But since there was some time to kill I decided, being me, to go to work," she said. She crashed her car into a pole in a garage on M Street.

The MRI showed that Storch had several lesions, indicative of inflammation, in her brain. She was admitted to the hospital the next morning, where she was eventually told that she had multiple sclerosis, a chronic disease characterized by inflammation in the brain and the spinal cord. While Storch was in the hospital, her mother and her sister used breast milk from the freezer to feed her son, who had never had formula.

Despite her diagnosis, there was little clarity. In the hospital, she recalled, there was one doctor who, in response to her husband's questions, replied, "Have you heard of Google?" (Storch says that she did go down "a Google rabbit hole, and I didn't find anything that helped me.")

After Storch went home, she started seeing a neurologist, who, she said, "was doing the best with the tools they had—this was not an M.S. specialist." The neurologist put her on a pill that had recently been approved by the F.D.A. She began seeing a psychotherapist, too. "She wanted me to educate her on the disease," Storch said. "She would ask questions like 'Is it possible that you could be in a wheelchair?'" Storch realized that she didn't know. Also, the medication she was taking didn't seem to be helping.

Around that time, Storch received an e-mail from someone she knew at work, recommending a doctor. "That was how I found Dr. Sadiq," Storch said.

Saud Sadiq is the director and chief research scientist of the Tisch Multiple Sclerosis Research Center of New York and the head of the adjacent clinical practice. Speaking with his patients can feel like speaking with devotees of one of those bands which border on being a religion. Patients told me that he talked with them until they ran out of questions, that he saw them on a Saturday so they could have their normal life, that he gave them his cell-phone number. Amelia Collins, who has been his patient for twenty-three years, told me that

ILLUSTRATION BY JUN CEN

she once heard his cell phone ring while he was performing a spinal tap. He said to her, "You see, this is the only time I won't answer my phone, because I have your spine in my hands—otherwise I would answer."

Storch said, "We sat in his office, and everything that I thought a health-care experience should be—that was what it was. It felt like he had unlimited time."

There are two main types of M.S.: a relapsing-remitting form (R.R.M.S.) and a progressive form. Both attack the brain and the spinal cord and can become debilitating if not treated, but R.R.M.S. usually responds well to current therapies. The progressive form, which often presents as what is called the primary-progressive type (P.P.M.S.), which affects about fifteen per cent of patients, tends not to. As their names suggest, R.R.M.S. is characterized by symptoms that flare up and then often spontaneously remit, and P.P.M.S. proceeds more inexorably. Sadiq told Storch that she likely had R.R.M.S., and advised her that an aggressive course of treatment could stave off further disability. Once damage is done, it is often irreversible. He told her that the medication she was taking may as well have been a water pill.

"The other thing about Sadiq's practice was that everything was there," Storch said. Sadiq's center, which he founded in 2006, has an unusual structure. Research, occupational therapy, social work, nutrition counselling, MRIs, physical therapy—they all take place on two floors of a building on Fifty-seventh Street, in Manhattan, and all are devoted almost exclusively to M.S. The center's research arm, a nonprofit supported in part with funding from the Tisch family, has space for lab animals and for growing experimental tissues, and nearby there are rooms for working with weights, for speaking with a social worker, for receiving infusions of steroids—everything an M.S. patient, or an M.S. researcher, might need. Storch sees a nutritionist there, and for the first year she regularly sought counsel from a social worker on staff. "I needed help with my mental health very badly," she said. Storch disbelieved Sadiq's optimistic prognosis: "I would go to the social worker and say, 'How do I know he's not lying to me?' She would reassure me and say that she had been there for ten years, and that if that was how he was practicing, we would probably know that by now."

Sadiq told Storch that she would have no more disease progression, and, she said, "that has been the case." She takes a drug, Ocrevus, that eliminates her B cells, an element of the immune system which, in M.S. patients, attacks the nervous system. Her Ocrevus infusions, given twice a year, are accompanied by an infusion of steroids. "I know that knocks me out for a couple days, so I plan on that," she said. "I save a bad TV show to watch." She also takes two medications that help with symptoms: gabapentin for numbness and tingling, and modafinil for fatigue. "I used to call the office so often, but now M.S. is less at the forefront of my life. It's just something I manage like I manage everything else," she told me. Storch struck me as professional, reserved, and put-together. She teared up only once, when she said she didn't know what her life would be like today if she hadn't met Sadiq.

I recently spent a couple of stressful months trying to get appointments for a close relative with a newly diagnosed neurodegenerative disease—appointments with neurologists and ophthalmologists and neuro-ophthalmologists and radiologists—and trying to find, as several of the neurologists suggested, a way to get an appointment with the right *kind* of neurologist. I often wished there were a practice organized like Sadiq's, with all the players in one house, and clinical trials as well as basic scientific research happening there, too, where the researchers' ambitions were influenced by the problems seen each day. "It happened not by careful thought but because, when I was the chairman of neurology at St. Luke's-Roosevelt, I was frustrated with the bureaucracy, and the bureaucracy getting in the way of the research, so I decided to open an independent lab and practice," Sadiq told me, when I visited the center not long ago. "If I had thought about it, I wouldn't have done it, because there was no prototype to copy. In hindsight, it was unlikely to be successful." Sadiq was especially eager to show me the backup ventilation system for the animal-care area—it was so large that it had to be installed through the windows. "If we want to do creative and innovative research—that's very difficult to do when you're under pressure to publish or secure more funding," he said, explaining why he valued working outside a research hospital like those in which he trained.

The approach of housing all M.S. services together, as at Sadiq's practice, can seem less than revolutionary, but at a recent "patients as teachers" session at the Barlo Multiple Sclerosis Center, at St. Michael's Hospital, in Toronto, the patients spoke about the value of having care from different providers be coördinated. Providers want this, too—it is sometimes called comprehensive care—but the usual demons of funding and structural change are difficult to overcome. Even the Barlo center, a strong model for comprehensive care, is described by its director, Jiwon Oh, as "still a work in progress."

Sadiq is gently boastful of how his center functions. "I saw a patient yesterday who was seen at an Ivy League M.S. center, and they told her she needed another MRI but couldn't schedule it until two weeks later," he told me, "and her treatment couldn't start for another three weeks after that. When she came to see me yesterday, because we have two MRI facilities downstairs, we did it immediately and she's starting treatment tomorrow." A popular saying in the treatment of strokes is "Time is brain"—it's important to get a clot dissolved as soon as possible. Today, with M.S., there is a similar emphasis on early treatment, since time is both brain and spinal cord. "She is going to get married in November, and I want her to have a good wedding, walk down the aisle," Sadiq said.

Sadiq, who is sixty-eight, is fond of describing himself as a "very boring-in-general guy," and "just an old man working" who occasionally attends a Yankees game. "But I am too busy, so mostly I give my tickets away," he added. His wife died of ovarian cancer last year, and his son is in his thirties. Sadiq lives in New Jersey with his mother, who is a healthy ninety. "This is my dream, I love what I do, my life is this," he said of his research and clinical practice. He feels that he has "limited time," and told me, "I hope to find these things"—better treatments for M.S.—"quickly."

Sadiq was born in Kenya, and graduated from the University of Nairobi's

medical school in 1979. He did his residency in internal medicine in Kenya and in the U.K. between 1981 and 1985, and so has witnessed the arc of how dramatically M.S. outcomes have changed in the past half century. "When I was in school, and in residency, M.S. was a dead-end disease. It overwhelmingly led to disability," he told me in his office, which is decorated with model ships, Yankees paraphernalia, illuminated Torah passages, golden Virgin Mary icons, and other gifts he has received during his decades as a neurologist. The patient was often a young woman, since M.S. affects women three times as often as men and tends to present in a person's twenties or thirties. Part of the terror of M.S. was not knowing when an attack—which might manifest as a loss of sensation, or a loss of vision, or a loss of strength, or any other number of troubling losses—would come. Patients were not unlikely to end up confined to a wheelchair, or to have a sense of pressure on their chest, a dread of warm days, trouble seeing or blindness, or difficulty controlling their bladder and bowel movements; sometimes holding a pencil was a challenge. "If the patient was young, you would not tell her about her prognosis for as long as you could," Sadiq said. "That seems crazy to me now. But that was what was done. You told the parents or the spouse, but not the patient."

In 1985, Sadiq moved to Austin, for a residency in neurology at the University of Texas. It was, he said, "the year after MRIs came into widespread clinical use." MRIs are now commonplace, but they're still astonishing: after you're slid into an MRI machine, all the water molecules in your body orient themselves along the lines of a magnetic field, as if saluting; radio energy is then pulsed through the body, which stimulates the protons of those water molecules to varying degrees, depending on the part of the body. MRIs are thus particularly good at imaging soft tissues, such as muscles, abdominal organs, and the brain, where the lesions typical of M.S. show up. "Previously, you were working with subjective complaints," Sadiq explained. "Now you could objectively characterize the lesions." In early years, MRIs were used only for diagnosis, because the machines were rare; now they're also used to monitor disease progression.

MRI imaging is not just about helping a doctor "believe" a patient's story, or giving a patient the validating feeling of "seeing" her illness—it also opens up research possibilities, by enabling physicians to share a common language that is quantitative and transmissible (if still limited, since MRIs are just fancy pictures, and cannot explain all that a patient experiences). Whereas the move to make more room for a patient's subjective experience helps in individual cases, the ability to speak both generally and precisely helps when thinking of a disease across thousands, or hundreds of thousands, of cases. If you were to think of the research trajectory of M.S. as a nineteenth-century novel, then the arrival of the MRI would be a decisive plot turn; in the data-mining storytelling of the twenty-first century, the change comes from the networks of thousands of patients and researchers coördinating and building up a body of knowledge bit by bit.

Multiple sclerosis presents far more variously than most other illnesses; for that reason, it has been called "the great imitator." Some of the conditions it can resemble are minor, and others are major. If you have ever Googled a random tingling or twinge or eyebrow twitch, you have probably spent at least one evening convinced that you have M.S. On the other hand, M.S. patients often think for a while that they don't have much going on. One person's first symptom might be numbness. A different patient might experience weakness. Or an unexplained fall, or fatigue, or difficulty urinating or walking. In the United States, the incidence is around three people in a thousand, which is either rare or common, depending on the emotional heft you ascribe to a third of one per cent of the population.

Until recently, patients weren't given medication before they were in distress; now treatment tends to come early, with the highest-efficacy drugs available. Oh, of the Barlo center, told me, "When I went into neurology residency"—in 2005—"the field was still sometimes called 'diagnose and adios,' because it seemed like there was so little that could be done for patients with these chronic neurological diseases," such as M.S., Parkinson's, A.L.S., and Alzheimer's. "M.S. is the only chronic neurological disease where there's been a very dramatic change." In 1993, there were no approved M.S.-specific drug therapies; now there are more than twenty. Some treatments broadly target a patient's immune response, and others interfere with the production of particular elements of the immune response which attack the patient's nervous system. A study from Turkey comparing the records of an M.S. clinic in 1996 with those at the same clinic twenty years later showed a dramatic decline in the number of wheelchair-dependent patients—a particularly visible measure of disease.

When I spoke with Oh, she had been asked to address an A.L.S. conference, so that A.L.S. researchers might learn from the M.S. community. I asked her what she thought accounted for the progress; she talked about how visible the disease is, especially because it most often hits young people. "I don't want that to sound ageist," she said. It's not unusual to know someone for whom the course of family and work life has been remarkably altered by M.S.; that attracts funding. Oh's center raised twenty-one million dollars for its launch, which her hospital matched. The facility, which treats nine thousand patients, has expanded from four clinic rooms to twenty; its research and clinical arms are now on adjacent floors, and physical therapy, occupational therapy, and social work are also integrated into the space.

Jeffrey Cohen, the director of experimental therapeutics at the Cleveland Clinic's Mellen Center for Multiple Sclerosis Treatment and Research, said, "The field does seem to be a little more organized. We have a well-developed set of diagnostic criteria, and a well-developed methodology for testing treatments and deciding whether they work. But another part of it may be that success begets success." When something goes well, funding tends to come your way to do more such work.

For centuries, the treatment of M.S. hardly advanced at all. In the fourteenth century, a physician wrote of a Dutch woman named Lidwina of Schiedam, "Believe me there is no cure

for this illness, it comes directly from God." Lidwina's is one of the first documented instances of what was most likely multiple sclerosis. Her illness, at the time, was attributed not only to God but to a fall while ice skating; she is said to have celebrated her paralysis and pain as an offering to Him, and she is now the patron saint of ice skating. People tried to ameliorate M.S. with leeches, quinine, foxglove, tobacco, hemlock, valerian, coffee, tea, being suspended above the ground, vertically, for four minutes at a time, and being wrapped in sheets sprayed with cold water. The nineteenth-century German poet Heinrich Heine ("There are two kinds of rat/The hungry and the fat") did not know what he was suffering from when he wrote to a friend, "My legs are like cotton and I am carried about like a child. . . . My right hand is beginning to wither and God knows whether I shall ever be able to write to you again. Dictation is painful because of my paralyzed jaw. My blindness is still the last of my ills." Heine, who died at fifty-eight, had a gash on his neck, inflicted deliberately, to which various ointments were administered.

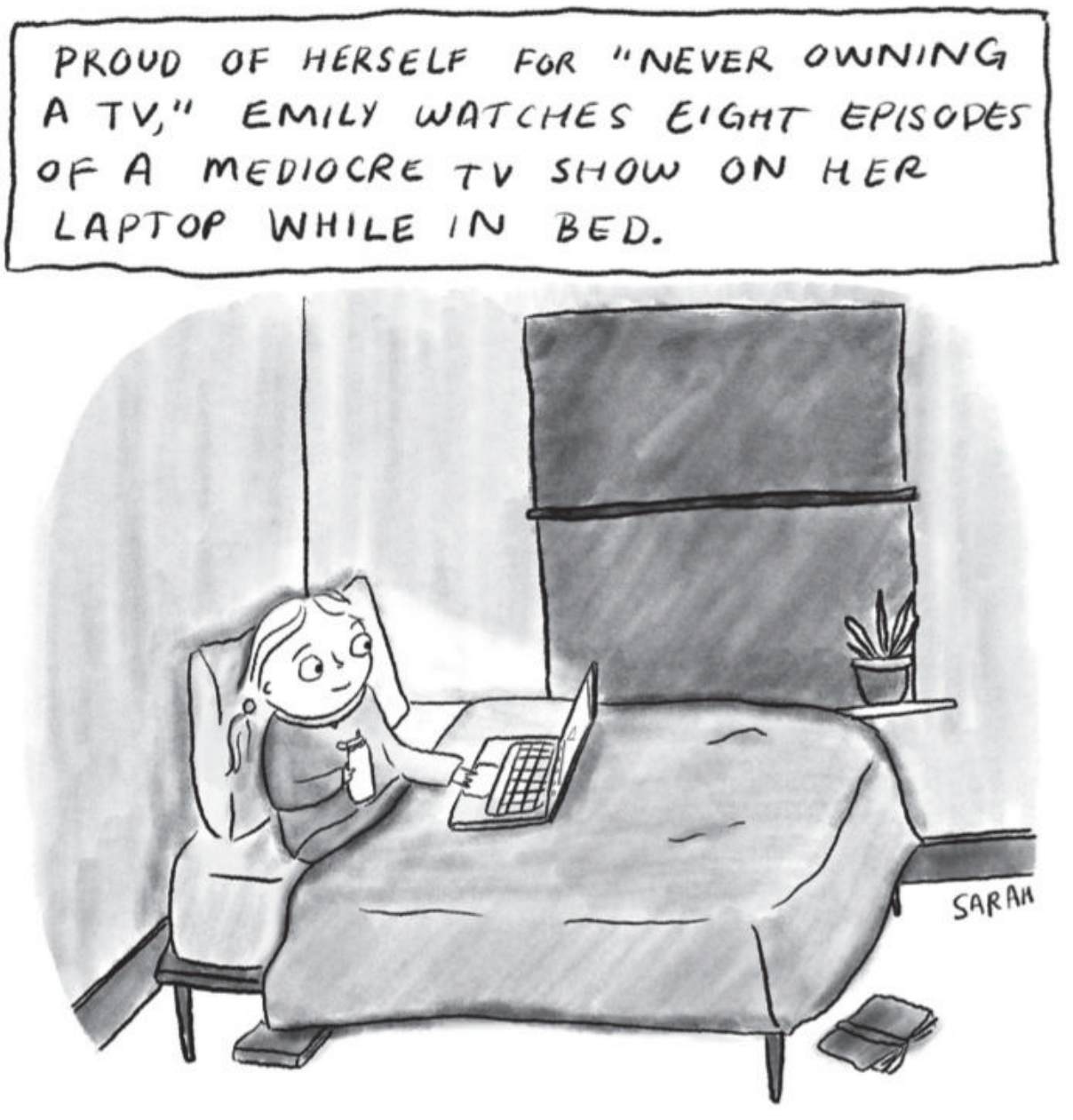
The underlying causes of the symptoms of M.S. began to be gleaned with the work of the nineteenth-century French physician Jean-Martin Charcot, who is today considered a founder of modern neurology. The son and the grandson of carriage-makers, and the oldest of four brothers, Charcot was chosen by his father as the child who would get a costly advanced education. He studied medicine at the University of Paris. His brothers kept his study cozy with a hot cannon ball resting in a bucket of sand. Upon becoming a physician, Charcot took a position at the Salpêtrière Hospital, an old ammunitions factory that had been turned into, in his words, a "great asylum (of human misery)."

Salpêtrière held some five thousand patients. They were affected by chronic diseases of many kinds, but especially those of the nervous system. "We are, in other words, in possession of some sort of museum of living pathology of great resources," Charcot wrote. His great scientific move can seem, in retrospect, ordinary. He set about differentiating and classifying, by symptoms, the residents of Salpêtrière, and then following them over time—including after their deaths, by studying their cadavers.

One case in particular focussed his attention on the destruction he saw in the brains and the spinal cords of certain cadavers. Charcot had hired as a maid a woman named Luc, who had motor difficulties. Charcot noticed that Luc's tremors worsened when she moved about, and subsided when she was at rest—a different pattern from that found in Parkinson's. (Charcot, with his colleague Alfred Vulpian, was the first to distinguish the diseases.) Luc broke quite a few dishes. As her symptoms worsened, she had to be admitted to Salpêtrière. Did she have neurosyphilis? A tumor? When she died, in 1866, he studied her brain and her spinal cord. He saw what he called *sclérose en plaque disseminée*. His drawings of these lesions as he saw them under a microscope show droplets of myelin—the sheathing around a nerve—floating free from the axon, the body of the nerve. Charcot was a gifted artist, and often said that what made a good physician was the ability to see without preconceptions. We now understand that many of the varied symptoms of M.S. occur when the myelin around the axon frays. An analogy sometimes given is that the nervous system is like the wiring of a lamp, and the myelin like the wiring's protective sheath; when that sheath wears away, so much can go wrong.

In 1868, Charcot gave a series of lectures on the condition, which remain the origin story for the field today. He said that he did not know the cause of the disease; that it was most common in females; that the symptoms were intermittent and could spontaneously improve and then worsen again; and that "the prognosis has hitherto been of the gloomiest."

The physician T. Jock Murray, a specialist at Dalhousie University, in Nova Scotia, in his comprehensive book "Multiple Sclerosis: The History of a Disease," from 2005, writes about how theories of the causes of M.S. have shifted in parallel with trends in medical science: "In the era of Pasteur"—the father of germ theory—"it seemed to be an infectious disease; in the era



of environmental illness, it seemed a disease due to some toxin; when epidemiological techniques flourished, interest centered on mysterious demographic and environmental factors; as immunology flourished, it became an immunological disease, and in this age of genetics, gene probes, and the human genome, there is great interest in a genetic factor." This makes it sound as if each theory were later debunked, but Murray explains that the process of discovery was in reality cumulative. Cohen, of the Cleveland Clinic, summed up the current understanding: "Ultimately, we don't know the cause, but it's generally the same as I was taught in medical school—some genetic predisposition to an autoimmune condition, and superimposed on that are some environmental factors, including infection, that either trigger the process or play an ongoing role." Some research points to the Epstein-Barr virus, which virtually all M.S. patients have; yet it's been estimated that more than ninety per cent of the general population has it, too.

"There have been many times where the field has undergone a paradigm shift in terms of what we think is important," Oh, of the Barlo center, told me. Currently, the shift is toward trying to better understand the progressive aspects of the disease, and why it gets worse over time. Oh said, "Now we feel we really have gotten ahold of the acute inflammatory component"—the flare-ups that characterize R.R.M.S.—"and so that's made it apparent that it's the progressive component of the disease that we don't really understand." Oh is a lead researcher on a prospective study following a thousand M.S. patients in an effort to identify factors that cause progression.

Medical research is a strange salad of astonishing, horrifying, life-saving, intriguing, confusing, even sometimes boring activities. Charcot refused to experiment on animals, and famously had on his office door a sign that read "*Vous ne trouverez pas une clinique des chiens chez moi*" ("You won't find a dog clinic here"). What kind of research methods are being used today?

Several papers that emerged recently from lab research at Sadiq's center make this question vivid. Jamie Wong, a neuroscience researcher, was a lead author of a paper in *Brain*, published in February, which examined a number of antibodies found in the spinal fluid of P.P.M.S. patients. Wong had injected the spinal fluid of those patients into the spinal sac of mice, and determined that this provoked P.P.M.S.-like symptoms—weakness, in this case—in the animals. (The strength of the mice is measured by having them hold on to the tiny silver bar of a grip-testing machine.) When the antibodies were removed from patients' spinal fluid prior to its injection into the mice, the animals showed no symptoms of M.S. Of the many small advances that lead to interventions, this was a pretty big one.

Wong's background is in spinal-cord injury. She came to the center's lab because she wanted to do work that was integrated with a clinical practice—she meets patients. "That reminds me why I'm doing this research," she said.

"Whatever we do, we don't put in a comments section."

At the time that Wong was performing her mouse studies, Sadiq was recruiting Nicolas Daviaud, a French neuroscientist, who then began an organoid research project at the center's lab. Organoids are the almost impossibly strange thing you might guess they are: tiny organs, not connected to bodies, grown, sometimes in clusters of ninety-six, in what look like doll-house ice trays. Since M.S. is a disease of the central nervous system, the relevant organoid for research is a brain. Daviaud grows miniature brains, each of which bears the DNA of a patient. He and other researchers can then study how M.S. progresses differently—which neural tissue is affected, and when—according to an individual's genetic background, using these miniature brains.

Or, sort of brains. I spoke with Madeline Lancaster, a developmental biologist who runs a team at the M.R.C. Laboratory of Molecular Biology and who developed cerebral organoids. "They are not really brains—they are simplified brain tissues," she said. She brought out some preserved cerebral organoids that she keeps in her purse to help people understand what they are. Their containers looked like dice for playing Dungeons & Dragons. She observed that, unlike a human brain, which has one cerebral cortex, an organoid can have more than twelve—but that it still has

three layers of neural tissue around a fluid-filled ventricle, like a developing human brain. I asked—of course I did—if she worried that the organoids might achieve consciousness. She was patient. She said, "It's hard to define consciousness, but it's relatively easy to say what some of the prerequisites are." She mentioned needing neural connections between parts of the brain, as well as a way for information to get into the brain and out of it: "An animal that can't interact with its environment but that can still see—functionally it's blind." Basically, a brain needs a body.

Daviaud has a similarly untroubled relationship to the cerebral organoids he has nourished and grown. He explained his process to me: he takes hematopoietic stem cells, which we all have in our blood, and helps them multiply, then reprograms them into pluripotent stem cells, which are able to become any kind of cell at all. You may remember the controversy around whether researchers should be allowed to use stem cells from unwanted embryos. What few people seem to know is that this ethical conundrum was circumvented when a Japanese researcher named Shinya Yamanaka found a way to turn any old cell—hair, skin, blood—into a cell that, like an embryonic stem cell, can become almost any other kind of cell. (He was awarded the Nobel Prize for this work.) The process is "surprisingly simple," Daviaud said. He grows the organoids for about forty-five days, at which point they are a few millimetres in diameter.

Sadiq and Daviaud intend to use cerebral organoids to try to answer a number of questions, including how the Epstein-Barr virus affects neural tissue. Scientists also believe that organoids might be used to test drugs directly on human nervous tissue, and to produce spinal fluid or other cells that might be useful in therapies. "But we have so much we'd need to know before then, like what if these cells keep developing and become cancers?" Sadiq said.

M.S. researchers have also begun to dream about actually repairing damage from the disease. Several early-stage clinical trials in the U.S. are exploring the use of mesenchymal stem cells, modified in the lab and injected into the spinal fluid of patients with progressive forms of M.S., in the hope of reversing the disease's progression. Lauren Louth, a forty-four-year-old nurse, recently participated in a two-year clinical trial at Sadiq's center that was based on work by the researcher Violaine Harris, who has been affiliated with the center since its founding. The trial had what is called a compassionate crossover structure: half the patients received the stem-cell injections while the other half received a placebo; then, after a year, the treatments were switched, so that all the patients had access to the potential treatment. Louth first learned of her M.S. when she was working in an emergency room in 2005; she remembers looking at a patient and seeing double. She mentioned this to the doctor she was working with, and received an MRI and a probable diagnosis before her shift was over. "I told my fiancé, 'The wedding is cancelled, we're not getting married, you're not changing my diapers,'" she said. (She is now married to that fiancé and has two kids.)

Her symptoms worsened over time. Walking became difficult, her cognition declined, and she experienced a tightness known as an "M.S. hug." She lost some dexterity in her left hand, which is her dominant hand. "I would wake up and feel so heavy-headed, thinking, What will I lose today?" she said. She lived with the disease, sometimes taking medications for it and sometimes not, for many years. Then, in a particularly low moment, she travelled from her home in Rhode Island to see Sadiq, whom she had not met before. She wanted to ask his opinion about stem-cell therapies.

Louth ended up being Patient 48 in the stem-cell trial run by Sadiq's center. On paper, only small benefits over the placebo were seen, and only in patient groups with higher disability scores; for that subgroup, walking times improved, and also bladder function. Louth told me about her subjective experience of the treatment: "I feel sharper. That brain fog, that feeling of flightiness, where you're everywhere but where you're supposed to be"—she felt that it had lifted, and that her heat intolerance became "pretty much nonexistent." For the first time in a long time, she enjoyed rather than feared summer. Many doctors and patients say that the more difficult-to-measure symptoms—those that affect mood or cognitive function—are more important. Oh said that they are sometimes termed "silent symptoms," but "they are not at all silent for patients."

After the stem-cell trial, Louth "started having stability of symptoms," she said. "I don't wake up every morning thinking about what I will lose." Subjective reports are both more and less reliable than objective ones, in that they capture hope and happiness, and the state of our inner lives, which most humans agree are among the highest priorities.

Sadiq isn't all reason and numbers. Louth recalled that he told her he had prayed that he would be able to help her. Different emotional narratives coalesce around different diseases: it is not unusual to think of cancer as an invader; to think of autoimmune diseases as a betrayal of self; to think of neurological diseases as a sort of ghost or a supernatural takeover. It's not surprising, in that narrative, to learn that Charcot tried to hypnotize patients who had been diagnosed as hysterics. He held Tuesday-afternoon demonstrations, equipped with theatre lighting and a stage, which were akin to exorcisms. His most famous patient, Blanche Wittman, would go onstage and, in front of an audience that sometimes included Guy de Maupassant and Degas, cower as if seeing a snake, or bark orders as if directing troops—and then later have no memory of these acts. Some of Charcot's colleagues were appalled by the scenes, which they saw as a return to the pseudoscience of mesmerism. Charcot himself was also disturbed. That humans were so suggestible seemed like something science would need to account for. "In the last analysis, we see only what we are ready to see, what we have been taught to see," Charcot, the teacher of Sigmund Freud, said. After Charcot died, of heart disease that he had self-diagnosed, Blanche Wittman never had an attack of hysteria again. ♦

On March 20th, at Nashville's Bridgestone Arena, a block from the honky-tonks of Lower Broadway, Hayley Williams, the lead singer of the pop-punk band Paramore, strummed a country-music rhythm on her guitar. A drag queen in a ketchup-red wig and gold lamé boots bounded onstage. The two began singing in harmony, rehearsing a twangy, raucous cover of Deana Carter's playful 1995 feminist anthem "Did I Shave My Legs for This?"—a twist on a Nashville classic, remade for the moment.

The singer-songwriter Allison Russell watched them, smiling. In just three weeks, she and a group of like-minded country progressives had pulled together "Love Rising," a benefit concert meant to show resistance to Tennessee's legislation targeting L.G.B.T.Q. residents—including a law, recently signed by the state's Republican governor, Bill Lee, barring drag acts anywhere that kids could see them. Stars had texted famous friends; producers had worked for free. The organizers had even booked Nashville's largest venue, the Bridgestone—only to have its board, spooked by the risk of breaking the law, nearly cancel the agreement. In the end, they had softened their promotional language, releasing a poster that said simply, in lavender letters, "A CELEBRATION OF LIFE, LIBERTY AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS"—no "drag," no "trans," no mention of policy. It was a small compromise, Russell told me, since their goal was broader and deeper than party politics: they needed their listeners to know that they weren't alone in dangerous times. There was a Nashville that many people didn't realize existed, and it could fill the biggest venue in town.

The doors were about to open. Backstage, global stars like Sheryl Crow, Alabama Shakes' Brittany Howard, and Julien Baker, the Tennessee-born member of the indie supergroup boygenius, milled around alongside the nonbinary country singer Adeem the Artist, who wore a slash of plum-colored lipstick and a beat-up denim jacket. The singer-songwriters Jason Isbell and Amanda Shires walked by, swinging their seven-year-old daughter, Mercy, between them. There were more than thirty performers, many of whom, like Russell, qualified as Americana, an umbrella term for country music

Broadway, formerly a rough neighborhood with a handful of honky-tonks frequented

AMERICAN CHRONICLES

THE NASHVILLE UNDERGROUND

Tennessee's politics have turned hard red, and the ruling sound in Music City is still bro country. Can other voices grab the mike?

BY EMILY NUSSBAUM

VII

by locals, has become NashVegas, a strip lined with night clubs named for country stars.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ASHLEY GILBERTSON

"You guys are ruining my origin story."

outside the mainstream. In the Americana universe, Isbell and Shires were big stars—but not on Nashville's Music Row, the corporate engine behind the music on country radio. It was a divide wide enough that, when Isbell's biggest solo hit, the intimate post-sobriety love song "Cover Me Up," was covered by the country star Morgan Wallen, many of Wallen's fans assumed that he'd written it.

Shires, overwhelmed by the crush backstage, invited me to sit with her in her dressing room, where she poured each of us a goblet of red wine. A Texas-born fiddle player who is a member of the feminist supergroup the Highwomen, she had forest-green feathers clumped around her eyelids, as if she were a bird—her own form of drag, Shires joked. Surrounded by palettes of makeup, she talked about her ties to the cause: her aunt is trans, something that her grandmother had refused to acknowledge, even on her deathbed. Shires's adopted city was in peril, she told me, and she'd started to think that more defiant methods might be required in the wake of the Tennessee legislature's recent redistricting, which amounted to voter suppression. "Jason, can I borrow you for a minute?" she called into the anteroom, where Isbell was hanging out with Mercy. "The gerrymandering—how do we get past that?"

"Local elections," Isbell said.

"You really don't think the answer is anarchy?" Shires remarked, bobbing one of her strappy heels like a lure.

"Well, you know, if you're the dirtiest fighter in a fight, you're gonna win," Isbell said, mildly, slouching against the doorframe. "You bite somebody's ear off, you're probably gonna beat 'em. And if there are no rules—or if the rules keep changing according to whoever won the last fight—you're fucked. Because all of a sudden they're, like, 'Hey, this guy's a really good ear biter. *Let's make it where you can bite ears!*' "

That night, the dominant emotion at "Love Rising" wasn't anarchy but reassurance—a therapeutic vibe, broken up by pleas to register to vote. Nashville's mayor, John Cooper, a Democrat, spoke; stars from "RuPaul's Drag Race" showed up via Zoom. The folky Americana singer Joy Oladokun, who had a "KEEP HOPE ALIVE" sticker on their guitar, spoke gently about growing up in a small town while being Black and "queer, sort of femme, but not totally in the binary." Jake Wesley Rogers, whose sequinned suit and big yellow glasses channelled Elton John, sang a spine-tingling version of his queer-positive pop anthem "Pluto": "Hate on me, hate on me, hate on me! / You might as well hate the sun / for shining just a little too much."

Before Adeem the Artist performed "For Judas," a wry love song to a man, they summed up the mood nicely, describing it as "a weird juxtaposition of jubilance and fear." Backstage, however, they struck a bleaker tone: Adeem was planning to move to Pittsburgh—"the Paris of Appalachia"—with their wife and young daughter. In Tennessee, the rent was too high, and the politics too cruel. As much as Adeem appreciated the solidarity of "Love Rising," they viewed its message as existentially naïve: as Shires had suggested, the state was already so fully gerrymandered—"hard carved"—that, even if every ally they knew voted, the fix was in.

Only one mainstream country star played that night: Maren Morris, a Grammy-winning artist whose breakout 2016 hit, "My Church," was an irresistible pro-radio anthem that celebrated singing along in your car as a form of "holy redemption." Morris, who has had hits on terrestrial radio—the regular, non-streaming kind that you listen to on a road trip—was an exception to the rules of Music Row, where liberal singers, even supernovas like Dolly Parton, kept their politics coded, supportive but soft. Performers who were too mouthy, particularly women, tended to get pushed off the Row—and often turned toward the more lenient world of pop, as had happened with Taylor Swift, Kacey Musgraves, and Brandi Carlile (who, along with Amanda Shires, Natalie Hemby, and Morris, is a member of the Highwomen). Decades later, everyone in Nashville still spoke in whispers about what had happened to the Dixie Chicks, in 2003, when they got blackballed after speaking out against the Iraq War.

Morris had recently had a few skirmishes online with right-wing influencers—notably, Brittany Aldean, the MAGA wife of the singer Jason Aldean.

Morris had called her "Insurrection Barbie"; in response, Jason Aldean had encouraged a concert audience to boo Morris's name. Both sides had sold merch off the clash. The Aldeans hawked Barbie shirts reading "DON'T TREAD ON OUR KIDS." Morris fans could buy a shirt that read "LUNATIC COUNTRY MUSIC PERSON"—Tucker Carlson's nickname for her—and another bearing the slogan "YOU HAVE A SEAT AT THIS TABLE." (She donated the proceeds to L.G.B.T.Q. charities.) A few months before "Love Rising," Morris had done an interview with one of the event's organizers, Hunter Kelly—a host on Proud Radio, a queer-themed channel on Apple Music—and had told him that she wanted to be known for her songs, not her Twitter clapbacks. But, she added, she wouldn't apologize for having political opinions: "I can't just be this merch store on the Internet that sells you songs and T-shirts." Within the context of Nashville, she explained, "I come across a lot louder than I actually am, because everyone else is so quiet."

Near the end of the concert, Morris, a petite brunette in a floor-length tuxedo coat with a tiny skirt, sang "Better Than We Found It," a protest song, inspired by her newborn son, that she'd written after the death of George Floyd. During her opening banter, she had told a sweet, offhand story about watching her now three-year-old boy standing in awe as drag queens got ready backstage, amid clouds of glitter and hair spray. "And, yes, I introduced my son to some drag queens today," Morris added, sassily. "So Tennessee, fucking *arrest* me!" The next day, Fox News fixated on the moment.

After the concert, Adeem's Realpolitik echoed in my head. For all its warmth and energy, "Love Rising" hadn't sold out the Bridgestone Arena. And Adeem wasn't the only one leaving Tennessee: Hunter Kelly was moving to Chicago with his husband, frustrated that artists whose work he had celebrated for decades, like Parton and Miranda Lambert, weren't speaking out. That night, I caught a glimpse of the other side of Nashville, down the street, at the honky-tonk bar Legends Corner. A rowdy crowd was dancing and drinking, screaming the lyrics to Toby Keith's old hit "Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue"—an ass-kicking, jingoistic number that, twenty years ago, had helped knock the Chicks off the radio.

You notice certain things about a city when you're an outsider. There was the way everybody ended their description of Nashville the same way: "It's a small town inside a big city. Everyone knows everyone." There was the fact that every other Uber driver was in a band. There were the pink stores, with names like Vow'd, selling party supplies for bachelorettes. Above a coffee shop with a #BlackLivesMatter sign was a taunting billboard flacking a proudly "problematic" weekly. I had originally come to the city to meet a set of local singer-songwriters whose presence challenged an industry long dominated by bro country—slick, hollow songs about trucks and beer, sung by interchangeable white hunks. This new guard, made up of female songwriters, Black musicians, and queer artists, suggested a new kind of outlawism, expanding a genre that many outsiders assumed was bland and blinkered, conservative in multiple senses. What I found in Nashville was a messier story: a town midway through a bloody metamorphosis, one reflected in a struggle over who owned Music City.

Every city changes. But the transformation of Nashville—which began a decade ago, and accelerated exponentially during the pandemic—has stunned the people who love the city most. "None of this existed," the music critic Ann Powers told me, pointing out swaths of new construction. There had been a brutal flood in 2010, and early in the pandemic a tornado had levelled many buildings, including music institutions like the Basement East. But the construction went far beyond rebuilding; it was a radical redesign, intended to attract a new demographic. In hip East Nashville, little houses had been bulldozed to build "tall and skinnies"—layer-cake buildings ideal for Airbnbs. The Gulch, a once industrial area where bluegrass fiddlers still meet at the humble Station Inn, was chockablock with luxury hotels. Broadway, formerly a rough neighborhood with a handful of honky-tonks, had become NashVegas, a strip lined with night clubs named for country stars. Only tourists went there now. Mayor Cooper, meanwhile, wanted to host the Super Bowl, which meant building a domed football stadium big enough for sixty thousand people, which meant that the city needed more parking lots, more hotels—*more*.

This physical renovation paralleled a political one. The city, a blue bubble in a red state, had long taken pride in its reputation for racial comity, for being a place where people with disagreements could coexist: the so-called Nashville Way. Then, in September, 2020, the right-wing provocateur Ben Shapiro and his media empire, the Daily Wire, moved in from Los Angeles, followed by a large posse that included the online influencer Candace Owens, who left Washington, D.C., for the wealthy Nashville suburb of Franklin. This crew, along with other alt-right figures—the commentator Tomi Lahren, executives at the social network Parler—joined forces with MAGA-friendly country stars, such as Kid Rock and Jason Aldean, who owned clubs on Broadway. Under Governor Lee, who took office in 2019, Tennessee politics were blinking bright red: abortion was essentially banned; gun laws were lax; Moms for Liberty was terraforming school boards. Now the state wanted to ban drag acts and medical care for trans youth. When Nashville's city council, which leans liberal, refused to host the 2024 Republican National Convention, Lee vowed payback—and tried to cut the size of the council in half. A week after the "Love Rising" concert, a shooter—whose gender identity was ambiguous—murdered six people, including three children, at a local Christian school. The gun-control protests that flooded the Capitol felt like a cathartic expression of a population that was already on edge. At one rally, the country singer Margo Price played Bob Dylan's "Tears of Rage."

All through the pandemic, newcomers kept pouring in—a thousand a month, by some calculations. Sometimes it felt as if California had tilted, sending refugees rolling eastward like pinballs, and although some of these new Nashvillians were wealthy Angelenos fed up with living in a fire zone, there were more complex attractions. Tennessee had no state income tax, and Nashville had dropped its mask mandate. It was now possible to work from home, so why not try Music City? When Shapiro announced his move, he called himself "the tip of the spear"—and, if your politics

leaned right, Nashville was a magnetic force, with the whiteness of country music part of that allure.

For Nashville musicians, 2020 became a dividing line. Big stars died, among them John Prine, the flinty songwriter, and Charley Pride, the genre's first Black star. With tours cancelled and recording stalled, artists had time to brood and reconsider. Some got sober, others got high, and many people rolled out projects reflecting the volatile national mood. After Maren Morris wrote "Better Than We Found It"—which has charged lyrics such as "When the wolf's at the door all covered in blue / Shouldn't we try something new?"—she released a video featuring images of Black Lives Matter posters and Nashville Dreamers. Tyler Childers, a raw, bluegrass-inflected singer-songwriter from rural Kentucky, made a video for his song "Long Violent History" in which he encouraged poor white Southerners to view their fates as tied to Breonna Taylor's. Mickey Guyton, just about the only Black woman on country radio, released a song called "Black Like Me." The Dixie Chicks dropped the "Dixie"; Lady Antebellum changed its name to Lady A. Everywhere, cracks were appearing in the Nashville Way.

The same year, Morgan Wallen—a native of Sneedville, Tennessee, who had been signed by the bro-country institution Big Loud Records in 2016, when he was twenty-three—got cancelled, briefly. In October, Wallen had been due to perform on "Saturday Night Live," but after a video showed him out partying, in violation of COVID restrictions, the invitation was revoked. Then, after he apologized and appeared on the show, a second video emerged, in which he used the N-word. Country radio dropped him; Big Loud suspended his contract; Jason Isbell donated profits from "Cover Me Up"—the song that Wallen had recorded—to the N.A.A.C.P. And then, in a perfect inverse of what had happened to the Chicks, Wallen's album "Dangerous" shot up the charts. When I asked an Uber driver, a woman in her sixties with a scraped-back ponytail, what music she liked, she said, "Morgan Wallen, of course." Asked what she thought about the scandal, she said, in a clipped voice, "He come back up real quick. They didn't get him for too long. He's No. 1 again." When she dropped me off, she added, sweetly, "You have a blessed day, Emily."

Leslie Fram, a senior vice-president at Country Music Television and a former rock programmer who moved to Nashville in 2011, put it plainly to me: Wallen had split the city. To some, he was a symbol of Music Row bigotry; to others, of resistance to a woke world. He'd apologized, sort of, but he hadn't changed—not changing was a big part of his appeal. There was no denying his success, however, or the savvy of his handlers. His songs, starting with the 2018 hit "Whiskey Glasses," which opened with the line "Poor me—pour me another drink!," were all about the desire to drink the past away. His latest album, "One Thing at a Time," thirty-six songs deep, with lyrics by forty-nine writers—which followed a stand-alone single called "Broadway Girls," a collaboration with the trap artist Lil Durk that contains repeated mentions of Aldean's bar—ruled the charts. In March, a few weeks before the "Love Rising" concert, Wallen announced a pop-up concert at the Bridgestone; it set an attendance record for the arena. Later that month, Wallen headlined Governor Lee's inaugural banquet.

When Holly G., a flight attendant, was grounded by the pandemic, she sank into a depression. For nine months, she holed up at her mother's house in Virginia, soaking in bad news. In December, 2020, she found herself watching a YouTube video of a shaggy-

haired, sweet-faced Morgan Wallen, seated on a rural porch and crooning the song "Talkin' Tennessee" to an acoustic guitar: "What you say we grab some tailgate underneath the stars / Catch a few fireflies in a moonshine jar." Holly played the video on a loop, soothed by its gentleness. "It was what got me out of that funk, listening to music," she told me. "And then, in February, he was caught saying the N-word."

Before 2020, Holly had never thought deeply about what it meant to be a Black fan of country music: it was just a quirky taste that she'd picked up as a kid, watching videos on CMT. Now the national racial reckoning had her questioning everything. Wallen's behavior felt like a personal betrayal; she'd started reading widely, learning more about the history of country music. The genre had started, in the early twentieth century, as a multiethnic product of the rural South, merging the sounds of the Irish fiddle, the Mexican guitar, and the African banjo. Then, in the early twenties, Nashville radio producers split that music into twin brands: race records, marketed to Black listeners (which became rhythm and blues and, later, rock and roll), and "hillbilly music," which became country-and-Western. By the time Holly started listening, the genre had long been coded as the voice of the rural white Southerner, with a few Black stars, like Pride or Darius Rucker or Kane Brown, as exceptions to the rule.

In the spring of 2021, Holly created a Web site for Black country fans, Black Opry, hoping to find like-minded listeners. Unexpectedly, she discovered a different group: Black country artists, a world she knew less about. Among them was Jett Holden, whose song "Taxidermy" was a scathing response to hollow online activism, sung in the voice of a murdered Black man: "I'll believe that my life matters to you / When I'm more than taxidermy for your Facebook wall." Holly became an activist herself—and then, to her surprise, a promoter, compiling a list of hundreds of performers and booking them across the country, as a collective, under the Black Opry brand. On Twitter, she embraced her role as a mischief-maker—and when she moved to Nashville, in 2022, she changed her Twitter bio to "Nash Villain." By then, she was embedded in the politics of Music City, meeting with executives at labels and at the Country Music Hall of Fame. Long-simmering debates about racial diversity had intensified in the Trump era. At the 2016 C.M.A. Awards, a week before the election, Beyoncé and the Chicks performed their red-hot country collaboration, "Daddy Lessons"; Alan Jackson, the traditionalist curmudgeon who popularized the nineties anti-pop anthem "Murder on Music Row," walked out.

In January, I visited Holly's home, in East Nashville, where members of Black

RACCOONS

Creatures at midnight: blinking
In patio light I flick on, thinking
I'd heard a noise. And had. Here stand
A trio on hind legs, bandit masks, band-

Of-outlaw grins at me behind the sliding glass.
Before they hunch to drink at the fountain base.
Deaf to the "On" clink of the timed waterfall
Sliding over the fountain face of Quan Yin, all

Lit up. Goddess of Mercy, half-closed eyes of stone.
"She who hears the cries of the world": she alone.
I cannot hear the lapping of thirst behind a glass door
Or, earphones on, the vast dying and just-born crying for

One tender voice, her call. Surveillance sky is boundless.
Each fearful face comes round, what terror's taught is soundless.
The goddess stares back at me. She can't stop hearing it, cry on cry.
My animal guests move on. The timer's off, the light gone. Dawn nigh.

—Carol Muske-Dukes

Opry were gathering to pregame before heading to Dee's, a local music venue. We sat on an overstuffed couch, and Holly showed me some videos on her TV. One was a song called "Ghetto Country Streets," by Roberta Lea, a warm, twangy portrait of a Southern childhood. ("I can hear my momma say, get your butt outside and play / And don't come back until those lights are on.") We all laughed and swayed to "Whatever You're Up For," an infectious dance-party number by the Kentucky Gentlemen, stylish gay twins who shimmied around a stable wearing leather pants and leopard-print shirts. The twins had the commercial bop of country radio, Holly said, but they were in a definitional bind. White stars often fold trap beats or rap into their songs, but, as the scholar Tressie McMillan Cottom has noted, the music still counts as country—it's "hick-hop." When Black men sing that way, their music is often characterized as R. & B. or pop. And gay stars—particularly Black gay stars—are a rarity, even in the wake of a trickster like Lil Nas X, who hacked the country charts in 2019, with "Old Town Road."

After we finished some videos, a singer named Leon Timbo picked up his guitar. A big, bearded man with a warm smile, he harmonized with the Houston-raised singer Denitia on a slow version of a classic R. & B. song by Luther Vandross, "Never Too Much." The cover, which he performed at Black Opry events, had been Holly's suggestion: an object lesson in musical alchemy. Timbo said, "It's difficult to take the song from its former glory, because in my house we know it by the beginning of it." He imitated Vandross's original, with its rowdy disco bounce—*boom, boom, boom*.

Holly said, "To me, a cover like this is bridging the exact gap that we need. Because Black people *love* some fucking Luther, and to take it and make it Americana—it takes it to a place they wouldn't have thought of. And, then again, it is also an example to white people, wondering what our place is in the genre."

If genre distinctions weren't so rigid, Timbo said, people might see Tracy Chapman—who was inspired to play the guitar by watching "Hee Haw" as a child—and Bill Withers as country legends. They would know about Linda Martell, the first Black woman to play at the Grand Ole Opry. A purist nostalgia about country music was ultimately indistinguishable from a racist one: both were focussed on policing a narrow definition of who qualified as the real thing.

After the show at Dee's, the group—several of whom were queer—hung out at the Lipstick Lounge, a queer bar with karaoke and drag shows. The queens did a rowdy call-and-response with the crowd: "Lesbians in the room, raise your hands!" In the vestibule to an upstairs cigar bar, I spoke with Aaron Vance, the son of a preacher with a radio ministry. Vance, a lanky man in his forties with a low drawl, was one of Black Opry's more old-school members. A Merle Haggard-influenced singer, he'd written droll numbers such as "Five Bucks Says," in which he imagined drinking with Abe Lincoln at a dive bar, talking about the racial divide. When Vance moved to Nashville, in 2014, he had been treated as an oddity, but in the farm community he came from, in Amory, Mississippi, it wasn't unusual to be a Black man who loved country. His grandfather, a truck driver, had introduced him to Haggard. Vance considered his music his ministry, he said, and the Black Opry collective had freed him to pursue his mission on his own terms. "You can't tell a wolf he's too much of a wolf," he said with a laugh—in other words, you couldn't tell Vance that he was too country. When I asked him what his karaoke song was, he smiled: it was "If Heaven Ain't a Lot Like Dixie," by Hank Williams, Jr.

On a bright spring morning, Jay Knowles picked me up in his red truck and drove us to Fenwick's 300, a diner where Music Row executives take meetings over pancakes. A Gen X dad with messy hair, Knowles had grown up in Nashville, with country in his blood. His father, John Knowles, played guitar with the legendary Chet Atkins, who helped pioneer the Nashville Sound—the smooth, radio-friendly rival of Willie Nelson's gritty "outlaw" movement. In the early nineties, when Jay went to Wesleyan University, he felt inspired by the rise of "alt-country" stars, such as Steve Earle and Mary Chapin Carpenter, who had clever lyrics and distinctive voices full of feeling. It felt like a golden age for both mainstream and indie musicians, as each side sparred over who was a rebel and who was a sellout—a local tradition as old as the steel guitar.

Knowles returned home and went to work on Music Row, becoming a skilled craftsman who joked, in his Twitter bio, that he was "the best songwriter in Nashville in his price range." He had scored

some hits, including a 2012 Alan Jackson heartbreaker, "So You Don't Have to Love Me Anymore," which was nominated for a Grammy. But, looking back, he was troubled by how the industry had changed since marketers rebranded alt-country as Americana, in 1999, and bro country took hold, a decade later. The genre's deepening division had been damaging to both sides, in his view: Americana wasn't pushed by the market to speak more broadly, and Music Row wasn't pressured to get smarter. It was a split that replicated national politics in ugly ways.

Knowles's job was, in large part, still a sweet one: he met each day with friends, scribbling in a notebook as younger collaborators tapped lyrics into the Notes app. His publisher paid him monthly for demos, and arranged pitches to stars. But no writers got rich off Spotify royalties. Knowles had watched, with frustration, as the tonal range of country lyrics had shrunk, getting more juvenile each year: for a while, every hit was a party anthem, with no darkness or story songs allowed. Recently, a small aperture had opened for songs about heartbreak, his favorite subject. But after years in the industry he was wary of false hope: when his friend Chris Stapleton, a gravel-throated roots rocker, rose to fame, in 2015, Knowles thought that the genre was entering a less contrived phase. But on the radio sameness got rewarded.

One of the worst shifts had followed the 2003 Dixie Chicks scandal. At the time, the group was a top act, a beloved trio from Texas who merged fiddle-heavy bluegrass verve with modern storytelling. Then, at a concert in London, just as the Iraq War was gearing up, the lead singer, Natalie Maines, told the crowd that she was ashamed to come from the same state as President George W. Bush. The backlash was instant: radio dropped the band, fans burned their albums, Toby Keith performed in front of a doctored image showing Maines alongside Saddam Hussein, and death threats poured in. Unnerved by the McCarthyist atmosphere, Knowles and other industry professionals gathered at an indie movie house for a sub-rosa meeting of a group called the Music Row Democrats. Knowles told me, "It was kind of like an A.A. meeting—'*Oh, y'all are drunks, too*?' "

But a meeting wasn't a movement. For the next two decades, the entire notion of a female country star faded away. There would always be an exception or two—a Carrie Underwood or a Miranda Lambert, or, lately, the spitfire Lainey Wilson, whose recent album "Bell Bottom Country" became a hit—just as there would always be one or two Black stars, usually male. But Knowles, now fifty-three, knew lots of talented women his age who had found the gates of Nashville locked. "Some of them sell real estate, some of them write songs," he said. "Some sing backup. None became stars."

Knowles felt encouraged by Nashville's new wave, which had adopted a different strategy. Instead of competing, these artists collaborated. They pushed one another up the ladder rather than sparring to be "the one." "This younger generation, they all help each other out," he said. "It feels unfamiliar to me."

Whenever I talked to people in Nashville, I kept getting hung up on the same questions. How could female singers be "noncommercial" when Musgraves packed stadiums? Was it easier to be openly gay now that big names like Brandi Carlile were out? What made a song with fiddles "Americana," not "country"? And why did so many of the best tracks—lively character portraits like Josh Ritter's "Getting Ready to Get Down," trippy experiments like Margo Price's "Been to the Mountain," razor-sharp commentaries like Brandy Clark's "Pray to Jesus"—rarely make it onto country radio? I'd first fallen for the genre in the nineties, in Atlanta, where I drove all the time, singing along to radio hits by Garth Brooks and Reba McEntire, Randy Travis and Trisha Yearwood—the music that my Gen X Southern friends found corny, associating it with the worst people at their high schools. Decades later, quality and popularity seemed out of synch; Music Row and Americana felt somehow indistinguishable, cozily adjacent, and also at war.

People I spoke to in Nashville tended to define Americana as "roots" country, as "progressive-liberal" country, or, more recently, as "diverse" country. For some observers, the distinction was about fashion: vintage suits versus plaid shirts. For others, it was about celebrating the singular singer-songwriter. The label had always been a grab bag, incorporating everything from honky-tonk to bluegrass, gospel to blues, Southern rock, Western swing, and folk. But the name itself hinted at a provocative notion: that *this* was the real American music, three chords and the historical truth.

The blunter distinction was that, like independent film, Americana paid less. (The singer-songwriter Todd Snider has joked that Americana is "what they used to call 'unsuccessful country music.' ") Not everyone embraced the label, even some of its biggest stars: five years ago, when Tyler Childers was named Emerging Artist of the Year at the Americana Awards, he came onstage wearing a scraggly red beard, and growled, "As a man who identifies as a country-music singer, I feel Americana ain't no part of nothin' "—a reference to the bluegrass legend Bill Monroe's gruff dismissal of modern artists he disdained.

Maybe, as Childers later argued, Americana functioned as a ghetto for "good country music," letting "bad" country off the hook. Or maybe it was a relief valve, a platform for musicians who otherwise had no infrastructure, given the biases of Music Row. Marcus K. Dowling, a Black music journalist who writes for the *Tennessean*, told me that, not long after the death of George Floyd, he'd written a roundup of Black female country artists, highlighting talents like Brittney Spencer, a former backup singer for Carrie Underwood, in the hope that at least one of them would break into mainstream radio. "Almost all of them ended up in Americana," he said, with a sigh.

Getting signed to Music Row demanded a different calculation: you became a brand, with millions of dollars invested in your career. The top country stars lived in wealthy Franklin, alongside the Daily Wire stars, or on isolated ranches whose luxe décor was shown off by their wives on Instagram. This was part of what made the bro-country phenomenon so galling to its critics: white male millionaires cosplayed as blue-collar rebels while the real rebels starved. The comedian Bo Burnham nailed the problem in a scathing parody, "Country Song," which mocked both bro country's formulaic lyrics ("a rural noun, simple adjective") and its phony authenticity: "I walk and talk like a field hand / But the boots I'm wearing cost three grand / I write songs about riding tractors / From the comfort of a private jet."

When Leslie Fram first moved to Nashville, a decade ago, to run Country Music Television—the genre's equivalent of MTV—she studied Music Row like a new language. "I understand why people who aren't in it don't get it," she told me, over a fancy omelette in the Gulch. "I didn't get it!" Fram, who has black hair and a frank, friendly manner, was born in Alabama but spent years working in rock radio in Atlanta and New York; she arrived in Tennessee familiar with Johnny Cash and a number of Americana types, like Lyle Lovett, but few others. It took her a while to grasp some structural problems, like the way certain songs never even got tested for airplay if the men in charge disapproved. Unlike a rock star, a country star required a radio hit to break into the touring circuit—so it didn't matter much if CMT repeatedly played videos by Brandy Clark or the African American trio Chapel Hart. Most maddeningly, if women in country wanted to get airplay, they needed to be sweet and bat their eyes at the male gatekeepers at local radio affiliates. According to "Her Country," a book by Marissa R. Moss, Musgraves—who had made a spectacular major-label début in 2013, with her album "Same Trailer Different Park"—saw her country career derailed when she objected to a creepy d.j. named Broadway ogling her thighs during an interview. Then the nation's biggest country d.j., Bobby Bones, called her "rude" and a "shit head." After that, her path forked elsewhere.

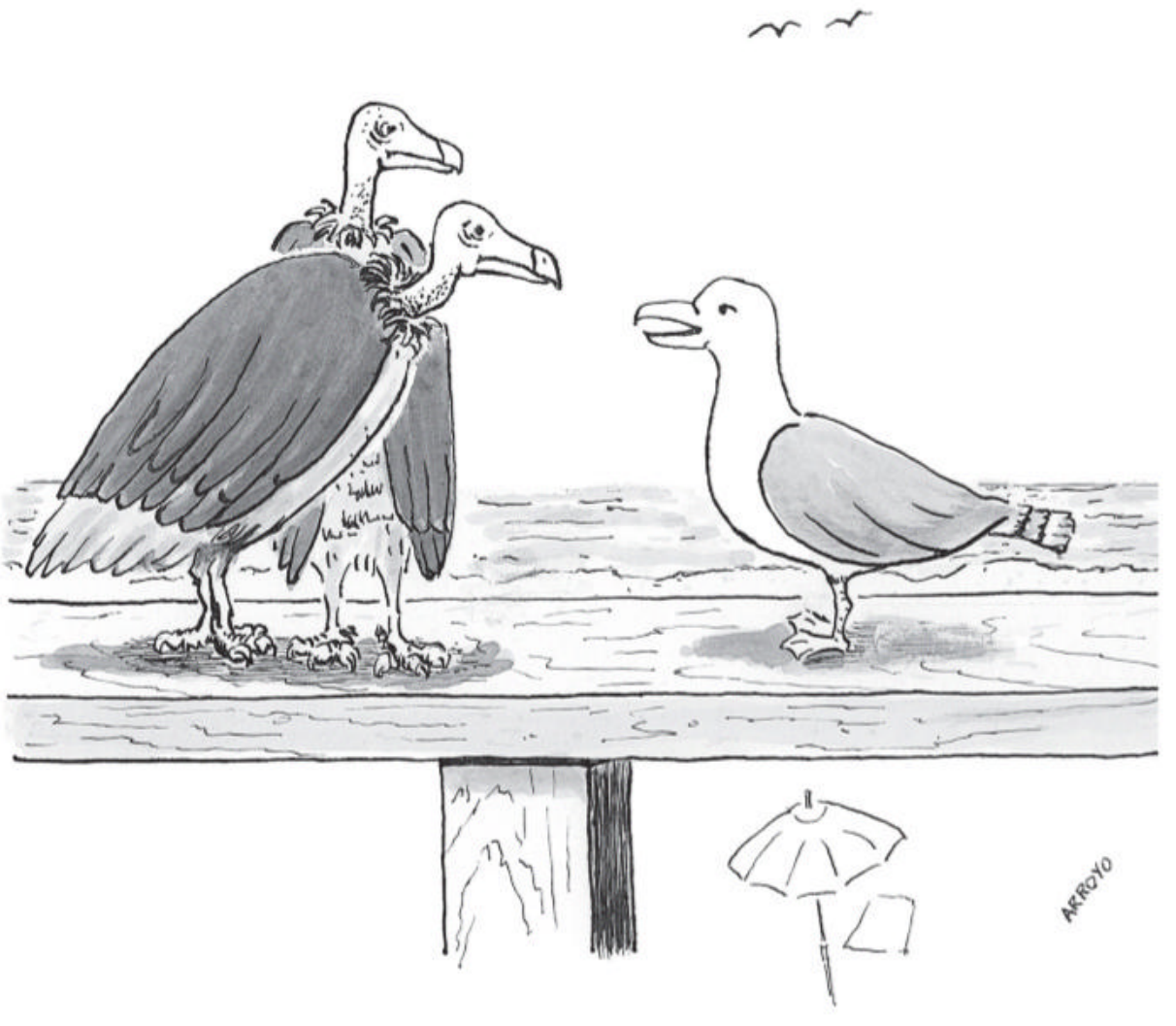
In 2015, a radio consultant named Keith Hill gave an interview to a trade publication, *Country Aircheck Weekly*, in which he made the implicit explicit: "If you want to make ratings in Country radio, take females out." For a station to succeed, no more than fifteen per cent of its set list could feature women, he warned—and never two songs in a row. He described women as "the tomatoes of the salad," to be used sparingly. Fury erupted on social media; advocacy organizations, like Change the Conversation, were formed. In 2019, the Highwomen released "Crowded Table," a song that imagined a warmer, more open Nashville: "a house with a crowded table / and a place by the fire for everyone."

Fram, who had recently launched Next Women of Country, a program aimed at promoting young female artists, was initially excited by what became known as Tomatogate. The controversy at least made the stakes clear. For the next decade, she met with other top brass, working to solve the gender puzzle. Did the proportions shift when Taylor Swift left the format? Was it residual resentment over the Chicks? Nothing that Fram or the others did made a difference—and radio play for women kept dropping. Finally, a top radio executive told Fram, "Leslie, A—the program directors are tired of hearing about this. Right? B—they don't care."

Hill, who started working in country radio in 1974, has moved to Idaho, where he is thinking of retiring. During a recent phone call, he presented himself, as he had in the past, as the jocular id of country radio—the last honest man in a world of "woke jive." The demographic for country stations was narrow, he told me: white, rural, and older, skewing female. He conducted focus groups in which he pinpointed people from specific Zip Codes who listened to at least two hours of a given radio station a day. Based on their feedback, his advice to programmers was firm: no more than fifteen per cent women, never two in a row. Country music was a meritocracy, Hill insisted. He was just presenting data.

Hill did love one hip-hop-inflected new artist, he told me: Jelly Roll, a heavily tattooed white singer from Nashville who had a moving life story about getting out of prison, kicking hard drugs, and finding God. He was country's "most authentic" new artist, in Hill's estimation, with an outlaw story to rival Merle Haggard's. Could women be outlaws? "You know, in central casting? I have my doubts," Hill said. He blamed one woman after another for blowing her chance at success. The Chicks had "opened their big mouths." Musgraves had "self-inflicted wounds." Morris had "injured herself significantly"—she'd shift to pop, he predicted. He saw a cautionary tale in the divergent careers of two Black artists, Kane Brown and Mickey Guyton: Brown, a shrewd bro-country star, knew how to play the game, but Guyton had "hurt herself by being a complainer."

The longer we talked, the more elusive Hill's notion of merit became. When he praised someone's authenticity, he didn't mean it literally—everybody faked that, he said, with a laugh. It wasn't about quality, either. Even if an artist was generic, and sounded like "seven Luke Bryans slurried in a blender," his songs could become hits—if he knew how to act. "Repeat after me: 'I wrap myself in the flag,' " Hill said. "Whether you are religious or not, when there's September 11th



"Sounds delicious, but I'm just going to grab some French fries."

or when train cars overturn, you better be part of the damn prayer." He could have saved the Chicks' career, he bragged: they should have talked about bringing the troops home safely. Such constraints applied only to liberals, he acknowledged. If you had "South in your mouth," the way Aldean did, your highway had more lanes.

Eventually, Hill stopped speaking in code: "You got thugging in the hood for Black people, and you got redneck records for white people." That was just natural, a matter of water flowing downward—why fight gravity? "Your diversity is the radio dial, from 88 to 108. *There's* your fucking diversity."

Jada Watson, an assistant professor of music at the University of Ottawa, began studying country radio after Tomatogate. What Hill called data Watson saw as musical redlining. The original sin of country music—the split between "race records" and "hillbilly"—had led to split radio formats, which then led to split charts. Never playing women back to back was an official recommendation dating to the eighties, formalized in a training document called the "Programming Operations Manual." The situation worsened after 1996, when the Telecommunications Act permitted companies to buy up an unlimited number of radio stations; the dial is now ruled by the behemoth iHeartRadio, which has codified old biases into algorithms.

Since 2000, the proportion of women on country radio has sunk from thirty-three to eleven per cent. Black women currently represent just 0.03 per cent. (Ironically, Tracy Chapman recently became the first Black female songwriter to have a No. 1 country hit, when Luke Combs released a cover of her classic "Fast Car.") Country is popular worldwide, performed by musicians from Africa to Australia, Watson told me. It's the voice of rural people everywhere—but you'd never know it from the radio.

All parties agreed on only one point: you couldn't ignore country radio even if you wanted to—it drove every decision on Music Row. As Gary Overton, a former C.E.O. of Sony Nashville, had put it in 2015, "If you're not on country radio, you don't exist." Not enough had changed since then, even with the rise of online platforms, like TikTok, that helped indie artists go viral. Streaming wasn't the solution: like terrestrial radio, it could be gamed. When I made a Spotify playlist called "Country Music," the service suggested mostly tracks by white male stars.

One day, I walked down to Music Row, a beautiful, wide street of large houses with welcoming porches. On every block, there was evidence of prosperity: a wealth-management company, a massage studio. I passed Big Loud, which had a sign outside touting Wallen's hit "You Proof"—one of the street's many billboards of buff dudes with No. 1 singles. Nearby, I wandered into a dive bar called Bobby's Idle Hour Tavern, which seemed appealingly ramshackle, as if it had been there forever. In fact, it had moved through the neighborhood; it was torn down to make way for new construction and then rebuilt to maintain its authentic look, with dog-eared set lists pinned to ratty walls. It felt like a decent metaphor for Nashville itself.

Inside, I ran into Jay Knowles, the Music Row songwriter. (It was a small town in a big city.) We talked about Nashville's recent reputation as "Bachelorette City," for which he offered a theory: although more than a quarter of Nashville was Black, the town was widely seen as "a white-coded city." "I'm not saying this is a good thing," he emphasized, but tourists viewed Nashville as a safe space, a city where groups of young white women could freely get drunk in public—unlike, say, Memphis, New Orleans, or Atlanta.

At the bar, I also met two low-level Music Row employees, who worked in radio and helped companies handle V.I.P.s. They happily dished, off the record, about clashes on the Row, but added that there was no point bringing their own politics into their jobs. It was like working for Walmart—you had to stay neutral. The problem with country radio wasn't complicated, one of them said: the old generation still ran everything and would never change its mind. When I explained that I was headed to Broadway to meet bachelorettes, they rolled their eyes. Avoid Aldean's, they said.

They weren't alone: every local I met had urged me to go only to old standbys like Robert's Western World, where I'd spent a wonderful night with Tyler Mahan Coe—the rabble-rousing son of the outlaw-country artist David Allan Coe—who hosts a podcast about country history called "Cocaine & Rhinestones." "I hate nostalgia," Tyler told me, spooling out a theory that true country music derived from the troubadours, whose songs had satirical subtexts and were meant to be understood in multiple ways. Bro country lacked such nuance—and so did the new Broadway.

Even so, Broadway charmed me, for a practical reason: there were no velvet ropes. Each night club had at least three stories. On the ground floor, there was a bar and a stage where a skilled live musician covered hits. On the second floor, there was another bar, another musician (and, in one case, a group of women toasting me with grape vodka seltzers). Above that, things got wilder, with a rowdy dance floor and, often, a rooftop bar. There was a campy streak to the scene which sometimes echoed the Lipstick Lounge: when the d.j. played Shania Twain's classic "Man! I Feel Like a Woman!," he shouted, "Do any of the ladies feel like a woman?" Loud cheers. "Do any of the men feel like a woman?" Deeper cheers. Call me basic, but I had a good time: in Manhattan, a slovenly middle-aged woman in jeans can't walk into a night club, order a Diet Coke, and go dancing for free.

Everywhere, there were brides in cowgirl hats or heart-shaped glasses, and in one case a majestic rhinestone bodysuit worthy of Dolly. On a bustling rooftop, I chatted with a group holding fans printed with the face of the groom—who, they insisted, looked like Prince Harry. At a club named for the band Florida Georgia Line, a screaming woman threw silver glitter into my hair. Every local whom I'd spoken to loathed these interlopers, who clogged the streets with their party buses. But when you're hanging out with happy women celebrating their friends, it's hard to see the problem.

The bar at the center of Jason Aldean's was built around a big green tractor. The bathroom doors said "SOUTHERN GENTLEMEN" and "COUNTRY GIRLS." The night I went, the crowd was sedate—no bachelorettes, just middle-aged couples. The singer onstage was handsome and fun, excited to get a request for the Chicks' "Travelin' Soldier." When someone asked for "Wagon Wheel," a 2004 classic co-written by Bob Dylan and covered a decade later by Darius Rucker, the singer spoke nostalgically about passersby requesting the song when

Adeem the Artist said that they were leaving Tennessee: the rent was too high, and the politics too cruel.

he busked on Broadway years ago, before the streets were jammed with tourists. "It just goes to show you that with a lot of dedication and hard work and about eleven years' time, you can go about a hundred feet from where you started!" he said. "So here's a little 'Wagon Wheel' for you!" Feeling affectionate, I looked up the singer online. His Twitter page was full of liked posts defending anti-vaxxers and January 6th rioters.

Taylor Swift got discovered at the Bluebird Café. So did Garth Brooks. A ninety-seat venue with a postage stamp of a stage, it's tucked between a barbershop and a dry cleaner, but it's a power center in Nashville—a place ruled by singer-songwriters. In January, Adeem the Artist wore a flowered button-down over a T-shirt that said "This Is a Great Day to Kill God." They were playing their first Bluebird showcase, performing songs from their breakout sophomore album, "White Trash Revelry." Some were stompers, like the hilarious "Go to Hell," in which Adeem fact-checks the lyrics to Charlie Daniels's "The Devil Went Down to Georgia" with the Devil himself: "He seemed puzzled, so I told him the story, and he said, 'None of that shit's real / It's true I met Robert Johnson, he showed me how the blues could work / But white men would rather give the Devil praise than acknowledge a black man's worth.'" Other songs were reveries about growing up amid "methamphetamines and spiritual madness." They were folky tunes played on acoustic guitar, with witty, pointed lyrics. The people in the crowd seemed to be into it, even when Adeem took jabs at them.

Adeem grew up in a poor evangelical household in Locust, North Carolina, singing along to Toby Keith—the self-declared "Angry American"—on the car radio, in the wake of 9/11. They dreamed about becoming a country star, but as their politics veered to the left they felt increasingly at odds with the genre. Then, in 2017, they won a ticket to the Americana Awards, and were struck by the sight of the singer-songwriter Alynda Segarra, of the band Hurray for the Riff Raff, sporting a hand-painted "Jail Arpaio" shirt, and by the Nashville bluegrass performer Jim Lauderdale taking shots at Trump. "I was just, like, 'Man, maybe *this* is it. Maybe this is where I belong,' " Adeem told me. Americana had another source of appeal for Adeem, a D.I.Y. artist with a punk mentality: you could break in on a shoestring budget. Adeem, who was barely scraping by painting houses in the Tennessee sun, had spent years building a following by uploading songs to Bandcamp. They budgeted what it would take to make a splash with an album: five thousand dollars for production, ten thousand for P.R. They held a "redneck fundraiser" online, asking each donor for a dollar, then recorded "White Trash Revelry" independently. (The album was distributed by Thirty Tigers, a Nashville-based company that let them retain the rights.) Adeem's strategy worked astoundingly well: in December, *Rolling Stone* praised "White Trash Revelry" as "the most empathetic country album of the year," ranking it No. 7 on its year-end list of the twenty-five best albums in the genre. This year, Adeem was nominated for Emerging Act of the Year at

the Americana Awards, and had their début at the Grand Ole Opry.

After the Bluebird gig, I joined Adeem at an Airbnb nearby, where they were experiencing some "visual distortions" from microdosing shrooms. Over pizza, they spoke about their complicated relationship with their extended family, back in North Carolina, some of whom believed in QAnon conspiracy theories. Adeem's relatives were thrown by, but not unsupportive of, their choices: when their uncle insisted that Adeem's gender identity was a rock-and-roll performance à la Ziggy Stardust, Adeem's father defended his child's authenticity, in his own way. "He said, 'No, no, I think he really believes it!' " Adeem told me, with a laugh.

There had always been queer people in country music. In 1973, a band called Lavender Country put out an album with lyrics like "My belly turns to jelly / like some nelly ingenue." But there were many more ugly stories of singers forced into the closet—and even now, after many top talents, including songwriters such as Brandy Clark and Shane McAnally, had come out, old taboos lingered. You could be a songwriter, not a singer; you could sing love songs, but not say whom you loved; you could come out, but lose your spot on the radio. When T. J. Osbourne, of the popular duo Brothers Osbourne, confirmed that he was gay, in 2021, his management company arranged a careful campaign: one profile, written by a sympathetic journalist, and one relevant single, the rueful but vague "Younger Me," which felt designed to offend no one.

Adeem, who is inspired as much by Andy Kaufman's absurdism as by John Prine's smarts, was part of a different breed. Queer Americana had plenty of outspoken artists, from River Shook, whose signature song is "Fuck Up," to the bluegrass artist Justin Hiltner, who wrote about AIDS in his beautiful single "1992." These artists, all left-wing, came from backgrounds like Adeem's—small towns, evangelical families, abuse and addiction. It was Adeem's biggest gripe: Music Row was marketing a patronizing parody of their "white trash" upbringing to the poor. Adeem's own politics weren't a simple matter. When they objected to Tennessee laws against trans youth, it wasn't as a liberal but as a parent and a redneck suspicious of government control: "It's, like, stay away from my kids! Stay out of my yard, you know?"

At the Airbnb, Adeem's transmasculine accompanist, Ellen Angelico, known as Uncle Ellen, pulled out a deck of cards: a beta version of Bro Country, a Cards Against Humanity-style game based on actual country-radio lyrics. The group got loose and giggly, shouting out clichés—"tin roof," "red truck"—to form silly combinations. In one way, the game mocked country radio; in another, it paid tribute to it—you couldn't play unless you had studied it. Like hip-hop, country had always been an aggressively metareferential art form; even bro country had become increasingly self-aware.

On bad days, Adeem had told me, the two sides of Nashville seemed locked in a "W.W.E. wrestling match," playing cartoon versions of themselves. Adeem had engaged in a few bouts themself, lobbing attention-getting songs online, such as "I Wish You Would've Been a Cowboy," which slammed Toby Keith for wearing "my life like a costume on the TV." Still, Adeem sometimes fantasized about what it would be like to meet Keith. They wanted not a fight but a real conversation—a chance to tell Keith how much his music had meant to them, and to ask if he had regrets.

"She's cute and everything, but between you and me we have no common interests."

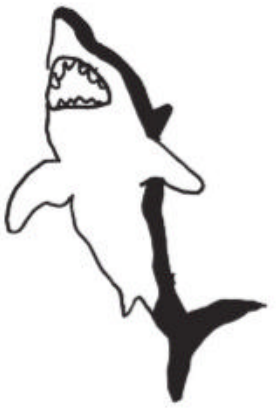
In mid-May, at the Academy of Country Music Awards, Music Row was out in force. Bobby Bones, the d.j. who'd insulted Musgraves, was backstage, interviewing stars. Wallen won Male Artist of the Year. Aldean sang "Tough Crowd," dedicated to the "hell raisin'… dirt turnin', diesel burnin', hard workin' nine-to-fivers" who "make the red white and blue proud." (A few weeks later, he released the repellent "Try That in a Small Town," an ode to vigilantism.) The show's highlight was a fun come-on called "Grease," by Lainey Wilson, who won four awards, including Female Artist and Album of the Year. Wilson, a farmer's daughter from Louisiana, was Music Row's latest female supernova, a devotee of Dolly Parton (one of her early hits was "WWDD") who'd moved to Nashville after high school. A decade of hustle had paid off: by 2023, she had a role on "Yellowstone" and a partnership with Wrangler jeans. Maren Morris wasn't

around: that week, she was in New York, accepting a prize at the GLAAD Awards. On Instagram, she'd posted a video of herself in a recording studio with the indie-pop guru Jack Antonoff. At a concert a few weeks later, she sang a duet with Taylor Swift.

The A.C.M. Awards' final number was the live première of Parton's new single, "World on Fire," from an upcoming rock album. When the lights came up, Parton was wearing an enormous, rippling parachute skirt printed with a black-and-white map of the globe—and then, when it tore away, she was in a black leather suit, chanting angrily as backup dancers strutted in Janet Jackson-esque formation. For a moment, it felt like a shocking departure—a political statement from a woman who never got political. Then that impression evaporated. Politicians were liars, Parton sang; people should be kinder, less ugly. What ever happened to "In God We Trust"? Four days later, on the "Today" show, Jacob Soboroff asked Parton which politicians she meant, and she replied, breezily, "All of them, any of them," adding that if these unnamed figures tried "hard enough" and worked "from the heart," matters would surely improve.

The performance reminded me of Keith Hill's advice to the Chicks: they should have sprinkled some sugar. Parton had been the biggest letdown for Allison Russell and the organizers of the "Love Rising" benefit, who told me that they'd "begged and begged" her to sing at the Bridgestone, or plug the event, or Zoom in. She'd performed with drag queens many times; she'd written an Oscar-nominated song, "Travelin' Thru," for the 2005 film "Transamerica." As Parton herself had joked, she *was* a kind of drag queen—a "herself impersonator," as Russell had put it. If the most powerful country star on earth wouldn't speak out, it was hard to imagine others taking a risk.

Another song performed that night had a different feel: "Bonfire at Tina's," an ensemble number from Ashley McBryde's pandemic project, a bold concept album called "Lindeville," which featured numerous guest artists. The record had received critical praise but little radio play. During "Bonfire at Tina's," a chorus of women sang, "Small town women ain't built to get along / But you burn one, boy, you burn us all." In its salty solidarity, the song conjured the collectives emerging across Nashville, from "Love Rising" to Black Opry, groups that embodied the Highwomen's notion of the "crowded table." You could also see this ideal reflected in "My Kind of Country," a reality competition show on Apple TV+, produced by Musgraves and Reese Witherspoon, that focussed on global country acts and included the gay South African musician Orville Peck as a judge, and in "Shucked," a new Broadway show with music by Brandy Clark and Shane McAnally, which offered up a sweet vision of a multiracial small town learning to open its doors. Mainstream country radio hadn't changed, but all around it people were busily imagining what would happen if it did.



McBryde, who grew up in a small town in Arkansas, had spent years working honky-tonks and country fairs, a journey she sang about in the anthemic number "Girl Goin' Nowhere." She was a distinctive figure in mainstream country, a brunette in a sea of blondes, with arms covered in tattoos. When we met backstage one night at the Grand Ole Opry, she was playing in a memorial concert for the character actor and pint-size Southern sissy Leslie Jordan, who had created a virtual crowded table during the pandemic, through ebullient Instagram videos, then recorded a gospel album with country stars such as Parton.

Unlike Jordan's joyful quarantine, McBryde's pandemic had been "destructive," she told me: unable to work, she drank too much, feeling like a "sheepdog that couldn't chase sheep." "Lindeville" had been the solution. During a weeklong retreat at an Airbnb in Tennessee, she had written for up to eighteen hours a day with old friends, among them Brandy Clark and the Florida-born performer Pillbox Patti. The result was a set of songs about distinct characters—songs that were blunter and less sentimental than most music on country radio. The album, which was named for Dennis Linde, the songwriter behind the Chicks' feminist revenge classic "Goodbye Earl," had a spiritual edge, McBryde said. She had grown up in a "strange, strict, rigid" place where she was taught that "everything makes Jesus mad," and it felt good to envision a different kind of small town. "The fact that God loves stray dogs, people like me, is so evident," she said. "There are things that I've survived, especially where alcohol was involved, that I shouldn't have."

McBryde, who called herself as "country as a homemade sock," had no plans to shift to pop, as peers had done. But she had a pragmatic view of the industry to which she'd devoted her life. Making music in Nashville, she joked, could feel like adopting a street cat, only to have it bite you when it turned out to be a possum. "He's a shitty cat, country radio—but he's a good possum," she said. To build a big career, you had to keep a sense of humor: "I won't name her, but there's another female artist who has a very vertical backbone, like I do. And we joke with each other and go, 'What are they gonna do—*not play our songs*?'"

I'd attended a staging of "Lindeville" at the Ryman Auditorium a few weeks earlier, shortly after Tennessee's first anti-drag ordinance passed in the State Senate. The event was framed as an old-fashioned radio show, with an announcer and whimsical ad jingles. T. J. Osbourne and Lainey Wilson were among the guest stars, creating a feeling of Music Row camaraderie. During McBryde's hilarious "Brenda Put Your Bra On," in which women in a trailer park gossip about neighbors—"Well, did you hear that? There went the good dishes / I hope they don't knock out the cable"—fans threw bras onstage.

At one point, McBryde serenaded a small child, who was seated at her feet. The show's climax was "Gospel Night at the Strip Club." Sung on an acoustic guitar by the Louisiana musician Benjy Davis, the tune was about having a spiritual experience in an unexpected place. As Davis sang the key line, "Jesus loves the drunkards and the whores and the queers," spotlights illuminated part of the audience. The congregation of the Church of Country Music looked around for what had been revealed, then gasped: five drag queens, scattered among the Ryman crowd, stood up, their gowns glittering like sunlight. ♦

LETTER FROM PORT-AU-PRINCE

A LAND HELD HOSTAGE

Overrun by gangs and neglected by rich allies, Haiti tries to save itself.

BY JON LEE ANDERSON

Last September, Ralph Senecal, the owner of a private ambulance company in Port-au-Prince, drove a friend who needed kidney dialysis to the Dominican Republic, where the hospitals are better than they are on the Haitian side of the border. On the way home, as he passed through the town of Croix-des-Bouquets, a few miles east of the capital, a group of men with guns blocked the road and forced him to pull over. The men belonged to a gang called 400 Mawozo—in Haitian Creole, the 400 Simpletons.

Senecal was taken to a brick building in the countryside, where he was held captive, sharing two rooms with some thirty other hostages. The structure had a metal roof, which seemed to concentrate the sun. "It was the kind of heat that gets you sweating at eight in the morning," Senecal told me. His hands and feet were kept tied. He was released only to relieve himself in a pit outside and, every three or four days, to bathe in a bucket of water.

A fit, ebullient man of sixty-two, Senecal splits his time between Haiti and the United States and previously served as a sergeant in the U.S. Army. Once his abductors learned of his military experience, they kept him under closer watch, worried that he might try to overpower them, or to escape. Senecal suspected that the gang members were connected to Haitian politicians. They had M16s, which he felt sure they could not otherwise have afforded, and they carried hand grenades. The leader was known as Lanmò San Jou—Death Without Warning. They were part of the same group that made headlines in 2021, when it abducted sixteen American missionaries and held them for two months.

The gang seemed to have chosen its captives without much concern for whether they could afford to pay ransom. About half of the people Senecal was held with were women and children, and few seemed rich. "There was even a guy who worked loading trucks," he recalled. The captives did their best to reassure one another. "We talked and cried together," Senecal said. "But we couldn't pray." The guards refused to allow it, because they were adherents of vodou.

Senecal was released after seventeen days; his family had paid the kidnappers more than two hundred thousand dollars, wiping out his savings and leaving him in debt. Still, he considered himself lucky. One of the men who guarded him was a previous kidnapping victim who had been held so long that he decided his best hope was to join the gang.

Violent crime has long beset Haiti, but in the past two years it has risen to an unprecedented level. In 2021, President Jovenel Moïse was assassinated, and the country spiralled into chaos. Since then, an unelected government has struggled to maintain order with an inadequate and corrupt police force, as the gangs that once operated exclusively in the slums have expanded across the capital and into the countryside beyond. An estimated two hundred gangs are now active in Haiti, and they dominate as much as ninety per cent of the capital.

In a nation of twelve million people, there have been at least a dozen massacres by gangs fighting over turf, killing more than a thousand Haitians last year alone. Women are routinely raped and men murdered; many of the victims are burned alive in their homes. Since the beginning of the year, according to a U.N. report, another thousand people have been kidnapped, and at least two thousand killed, including thirty-four police officers. Last fall, a gangster known as Barbecue took over the city's main fuel port for nearly two months, causing devastating shortages of gas, food, and water, with half of Haiti's population afflicted by acute hunger.

The beleaguered Prime Minister, Ariel Henry, appealed to the international

For decades, gangs have been enmeshed in

Haitian politics. After the country's President was assassinated, the balance of power tipped their way.

community to send a "specialized armed force" to break the gangs' control. The U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres promised to "stand by Haiti," and recommended that the Security Council consider a deployment. But no international force has been willing to incur the risk and expense of an intervention. The United States and Canada, which have often led past efforts to provide relief and security assistance, have made largely symbolic gestures, including sanctions against politicians and suspected gang leaders and programs to train the police. "The Americans and Canadians say they are our friends, but if they were they'd come and help us," Senecal said. "If I had the cash, I'd run for President. This country needs someone strong."

Exasperated by the international inaction, Haitians have begun taking the law into their own hands, led by a vigilante movement called Bwa Kale, from a phrase that translates roughly as Shaft up the Ass. In its first week of operation, Bwa Kale reportedly killed at least a hundred and sixty gang members. At the same time, though, gangs were reportedly sending out teams to avenge their dead comrades. Few people seem to believe that the Haitian government, weakened by decades of corruption, can bring the country under control. When I asked Prime Minister Henry recently how he planned to resolve the situation, he smiled and threw up his hands. "Haitians are very resourceful," he said. "Maybe they will invent something."

One morning in Port-au-Prince, I came upon a young man's body in the middle of a residential street, where houses sat behind garden walls laden with pink bougainvillea. He lay on his side, wearing jeans and a red shirt but no shoes. Blood had flowed onto the pavement from a wound in his head. In Haiti, it is not uncommon to see the bodies of people murdered by gang members and left in public as a warning to rivals. Some are charred after being set on fire. Others show signs of having been beaten or shot or hacked with machetes.

Another morning, under a brilliant blue sky, I saw the bodies of two young men sprawled at a busy commercial intersection. They had been hacked to death, but their wounds had stopped bleeding, so it appeared that they had been killed elsewhere and then dumped on the street. People walking by gave expressionless glances; the passing traffic did not slow down. A pickup truck arrived with armed policemen, who took up watchful positions but did not remove the bodies. Everyone seemed to understand that it was unsafe to show too much interest in the dead men.

During my visits this spring, I made my way through Port-au-Prince with a security detail of Haitian guards and former French Foreign Legionnaires. Most of the people I spoke to would agree to meet only inside walled homes. A few were willing to come to my securely guarded hotel, but only in daylight. There was an unofficial nighttime curfew, and most of the city shut down in the late afternoon. After dark, there were periodic gunshots, as unexplained as the bodies on the streets.

The places that were free of violence seemed to have been pacified by force. People in the capital were talking about a government prosecutor, Jean Ernest Muscadin, who had "solved" the gang problem in Nippes, a rural province west of Port-au-Prince, using what they referred to half admiringly as "tough methods." Muscadin's reputation had grown swiftly after a video circulated of him shooting a gang suspect to death. When a Haitian human-rights advocate criticized him for the killing, Muscadin threatened to arrest her, and thousands of people took to the streets to support him. On social media, some of his fans began acclaiming him as the next President and touting his methods as a model for securing the capital.

Commissaire Muscadin's headquarters are in Miragoâne, the sunstruck coastal town that is the capital of Nippes. It was impossible to travel there overland from Port-au-Prince, because gangs controlled the roads in and out of the city, but, after we arranged a meeting, I found a ride in a U.N. helicopter.

A trim man in his forties with a shaved head, Muscadin arrived in an S.U.V., with a pair of fierce-looking guards and his own assault rifle. Despite being introduced to me as the savior of Nippes, Muscadin scowled and avoided eye contact. When I asked how he had rid the province of its *bandits*, as gang members are called in Haiti, he replied evasively: "We chased them. There were a few that were absent. They were missing, but we also caught some." He said that there had been between a hundred and fifty and two hundred bandits in the region. And now? "Zero."

He attributed some of his efficacy to temperament. If *commissaires* elsewhere had failed, he said, it was because "they're not as brave, or not crazy enough." He also said that he had studied counter-terror techniques—especially the Americans' search for the fugitive Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, in which Special Forces mounted a ruthless campaign of strikes and interrogations around his home town. When I noted that the U.S. had lost the war in Iraq, Muscadin shot back, "Yes, but they got *him*."

Muscadin insisted that the gangs had been permanently expunged from Nippes. "With my force and rigor and discipline, there is no way they can return," he told me. When I asked where the missing bandits had gone, he gave a mirthless laugh. "They're just absent," he said.

For half a century, Haitians have endured a condition of menacing societal ambiguity, in which state power is inextricably intertwined with violence. It began during the Presidency of François (Papa Doc) Duvalier—a former doctor who won the country's elections in 1957. Duvalier took office promising to break a legacy of subjugation. Haiti had been dominated by the colonial French until a revolutionary uprising swept them out in 1804, and afterward it was forced to pay crippling reparations to its former overlords; in the early twentieth century, it was occupied by the U.S. military. Then as now, Haitians, who are mostly descended from enslaved Africans brought by colonists, were the poorest people in the Western Hemisphere. Appealing to Black pride, Papa Doc advocated a credo known as *noirisme,* which called for seizing power from the mixed-race Haitians who made up the country's élite. He handled the American government cannily, offering to help contain Cuba, and secured significant financial aid—much of which he and his cronies embezzled.

In office, Duvalier had himself declared President for Life. After a furtive coup tried to force him out, he formed a paramilitary force known as the Tonton Macoutes, a name borrowed from a

PREVIOUS SPREAD: GIOVANNI PORZIO / CONTRASTO / REDUX

bogeyman figure of Haitian myth. The Tonton Macoutes, heavily armed and backed by vodou priests, kidnapped political rivals and terrorized the populace with murders and rapes. The country's democratic institutions never recovered.

When Duvalier died, in 1971, the Presidency was handed to his nineteen-year-old son, Jean-Claude. Baby Doc, as he was known, ran a hapless and corrupt administration, further aided by the Tonton Macoutes. Over time, the Duvaliers' enforcers killed an estimated sixty thousand Haitians and drove countless others into exile. Public unrest finally forced Baby Doc from office in 1986, but the collapse of the dynasty did not bring peace. Instead, vengeful mobs set upon regime loyalists and torched their homes. Hundreds of shops and businesses were looted, and entire swaths of downtown Port-au-Prince blighted.

The Tonton Macoutes lived on, with some of their veterans forming the core of successor groups. When the country was ruled by a series of military dictatorships, starting in the late nineteen-eighties, they were known as *attachés*, because they were attached to the Army and the police, who gave them their weapons and their orders. After the charismatic leftist priest Jean-Bertrand Aristide became President, he disbanded the abusive Army and recruited his own enforcers from the vast slum of Cité Soleil; these became known as the Chimères—the Ghouls. As Aristide encouraged them in coded speeches, they deployed their own forms of terror, including one known as necklacing: executions in which victims were yoked with tires doused in gasoline and set alight. The practice has become widespread in Haiti, as a growing array of gangs have taken up the methods of the Chimères. People killed in other ways are set afire on the streets, in a gruesome display of dominance.

Haiti's most successful gang members lead lives of minor celebrity. The gangs not only outnumber the police; they're better armed, and they benefit from connections to the powerful élite who use them to secure influence. In YouTube videos, they brazenly celebrate their activities, often without bothering to obscure their faces. According to human-rights organizations, the gang leader known as Izo controls a port in the capital, from which he runs drugs and weapons. Ti Makak created a kidnapping ring that, in two years, raised him from obscurity to notoriety, before he was killed in fighting. Vitel'Homme, a former political activist, expanded his gang's ambit into the middle-class suburbs, where he looted guns and bullet-proof vests from the police and burned down their stations.

Gangs tend to flourish when the state is weak, and the state was weakened profoundly in 2010, when an earthquake devastated Haiti. A large section of Port-au-Prince was destroyed, and more than two hundred thousand people were killed. Even the Presidential Palace collapsed. In the chaos that ensued, the police dispatched death squads to pursue prisoners who had escaped from the city's jail. In some cases, civilians struck out at looters, and at others who seemed like a threat. I arrived in Port-au-Prince soon after the earthquake, and came upon the body of a young man tied to a wooden post. A group of displaced people had spotted him wandering in the street near where their families were sleeping, and, fearing that he was a zombie, they had tied him to the post and stoned him to death.

A semblance of order was imposed by several thousand U.N. peacekeeping troops. The force had been deployed in 2004, when Aristide was ousted from the Presidency, to aid the country's minuscule security forces. They were not popular in Haiti. In July, 2005, hundreds of peacekeepers engaged in a seven-hour firefight with gang members in Cité Soleil, reportedly firing more than twenty-two thousand bullets and killing as many as fifty people, including women and children. The U.N. force commander, Lieutenant General Augusto Heleno, offered no apologies. (Heleno later served as the national-security adviser to Brazil's far-right President Jair Bolsonaro.)

In addition to the Cité Soleil massacre, the peacekeepers were accused of sexual misconduct—and also caused a cholera epidemic, by dumping raw sewage into a river. Though ten thousand Haitians died, the U.N. never formally acknowledged responsibility, let alone compensated the victims' families. When the U.N. finally withdrew its soldiers, in 2017, it left behind a sense that Haiti had been betrayed by the international community. It also left a security vacuum, which the gangs quickly moved to fill.

The year after the earthquake, the popular *konpa* musician Michel (Sweet Micky) Martelly came to power, promising to accelerate reconstruction; he also appealed to national pride by calling for Haiti's Army to be restored. The

"Who wants salad?"

elections were disputed, and Martelly carried traces of scandal, including admissions of past drug use and a brother-in-law reputed to be a narco-trafficker. But he was charismatic, with unabashedly pro-American and pro-business views, and he had the support of the United States.

I interviewed Martelly in 2015, and he took me to a portside slum in Port-au-Prince called Wharf Jérémie, where he was unveiling a food market he'd had built. The area was under gang control, and, from the look of the watchful young men who formed a perimeter around Martelly's security cordon, some arrangement had evidently been struck. Martelly never explicitly admitted to dealing with gangs, but a former government adviser confirmed to me at the time that his people had made payments to them. The adviser, who had gone on to work with another political party, noted with a shrug that it, too, was paying off gangs. If you wanted to succeed in Haitian politics, you had to do business with them; whoever controls the neighborhood also controls the votes.

One evening during my visit, Martelly gave a raucous outdoor concert, delighting the crowd by pantomiming a giant phallus and teasingly asking if he should take off his pants. In mid-set, he paused to introduce his chosen successor, Jovenel Moïse. The two men were unlikely allies. Where Martelly was a famously gifted performer, Moïse was a previously obscure banana exporter who seemed a little bashful about his campaign nickname, Banana Man. But Martelly insisted that he was the kind of homegrown entrepreneur that Haiti needed. After the concert, he flew me in the Presidential helicopter to visit Moïse's plantation in the far north of the country. Haitian Presidents are forbidden to serve consecutive terms, but Moïse, a skinny, serious man, revealed that he and Martelly had agreed to a twenty-year plan, in which they would alternate terms in office. Haiti needed that kind of stability, he said.

Instead, the country's instability grew worse. Moïse claimed victory in the subsequent election, but an opponent alleged fraud, spurring violent protests, and Parliament installed an interim President. After Moïse was finally sworn in, two years later, the capital was riven by confrontations between police and protesters, mostly over fuel price hikes and allegations of official corruption.

Moïse ceded little ground: he raised taxes, and, after a stalled electoral process effectively closed Congress, he ruled by decree, while pushing for a constitutional referendum that would allow him to extend his time in office. He ended up managing to alienate many of Haiti's élite—including Martelly, whom he angered by enabling one of his adversaries to run against him in the next Presidential election.

As protests continued, gangs that were apparently aligned with Moïse tried

LEO GORCEY

The same name as the famous actor I
Am one of the last people to remember.
It's possible the two of them were cousins.

I called him Uncle Leo. That was the custom
Among that generation on the margins:
Young in America, improvising cousins.

Soon the computer itself will tell these stories.
He was a plumber. My mother said his fingers
Had oil-burner soot ingrained under the skin.

He was their Eighth Grade Valedictorian.
I wonder if the name goes back to Gorczyn,
A town in Poland a bit southwest of Lodz.

Public school was supposed to fill a void
Between democracy and capitalism.
Shakespeare and algebra and enough to eat.

The computer says I need to mention the Uncle
Leo in "Seinfeld," but that's not who I mean.
Maybe I live in the fifties more than the nineties.

My father had a uniform for *Gorcey's Oilers*,
A basketball team that Uncle Leo sponsored.
Like boxing it used to be a Jewish game.

His father was the Gorcey plumber before him.
Everyone blamed him for making Leo quit school,
But the old plumber wanted his son for a partner.

Maybe today a smart kid might quit school
To teach my computer how to write my poem.
Was "ingrained soot" a parable? What could it mean?

Small like his parents, who were Jewish and Irish,
The actor played a lowclass Dead End Kid
Named Muggs or Jock in a gang in a dozen movies.

My Uncle Leo was tall. His skin was clean.
The computer tells me there's a Gorcey's Plumbing
Still at the same address. It shows me the map.

—Robert Pinsky

to disrupt them with attacks, human-rights observers told me. Other gangs linked to Moïse's rivals struck back, erecting barricades, burning vehicles, and looting. Amid the violence, Moïse evidently forged an alliance with the country's top gang leader—a former police officer named Jimmy Chérizier, more widely known as Barbecue.

Barbecue lives in the central district of Delmas, a commercial strip that runs about a hundred blocks from the center of Port-au-Prince up into the surrounding hills. He was born and raised there, amid a warren of houses cobbled together from brick, concrete, and tin. Now in his mid-forties, he claims to have acquired his nickname as a child, when his mother sold chicken on the street, though a persistent rumor maintains that the name derives from his treatment of enemies. Barbecue joined the police as a young man, and rose to become a member of a special corps known as the Departmental Unit for the Maintenance of Order—but, like many other officers, he apparently determined that working with the gangs was more profitable. In December, 2018, he was fired after being implicated in a massacre in La Saline, a slum near his home, in which at least seventy-one people were killed and more than four hundred houses were burned.

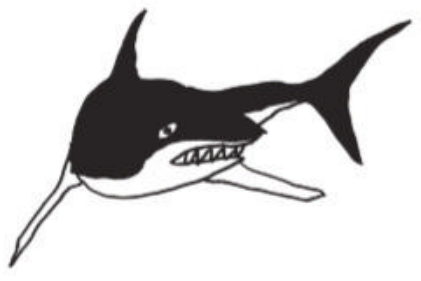
During Moïse's Presidency, Barbecue seized control of many districts of Port-au-Prince and built a reputation as a merciless overlord of the slums. In June, 2020, he posted a YouTube video announcing a new alliance of nine gangs, under his control: the Revolutionary Forces of the G-9 Family and Allies. Since Moïse's assassination, the G-9 has reportedly grown to more than a dozen gangs.

When I was in Haiti, Barbecue agreed to meet me, and one morning I was taken to a corner in his neighborhood and told to wait. After ten minutes, he appeared—a stocky, hard-faced man, surrounded by a cordon of teen-age boys with semi-automatic weapons. He wore black sweatpants with a colorful shirt, and carried a pistol loosely in one hand. Barbecue introduced himself, then immediately stepped away, saying that he needed to take a shower. He wandered into a house across the road, where a woman lingered in the doorway.

When Barbecue returned, he was wearing a black turtleneck and black jeans, and had traded the pistol for an iPad. Waving his bodyguards to sit in the shade nearby, he led me to a set of plastic chairs, next to a small house with a peeling pink façade and grilles on the windows—his home.

For several minutes, Barbecue studiously ignored me, apparently absorbed by his iPad. I asked him what he was reading. "I read the news," he said, looking up briefly. Any particular kind? "Nothing special," he said. "Everything."

He finally put down his iPad when I asked about the allegations against him; several human-rights organizations had concluded that, as he fought for turf, he was involved in a series of vicious attacks, in close coördination with senior police officers. "Let them prove it," he said. "The La Saline massacre. False. I was never in La Saline. Bel Air massacre. False. Massacre, massacre, massacre. False. All of these accusations are made because they can't control me politically." Barbecue argued that he had been unfairly fired from the police force: "That is the cause of misfortune that led to where I am today, but it also made me realize I had been a slave of that system and that I had to fight against it. Today, I feel much more useful than when I was a member of the Haitian police. There are a lot of people who depend on me." During our meeting, he walked into the road and ostentatiously handed a big bag of rice



to an elderly woman. "Every two weeks, she comes to me to ask for food," he told me. "If I have rice or peas, I give it away. The little kids, I pay for their school. And the young girls, fourteen or fifteen years old, I must watch over them to prevent them from being sexually abused. The community has been there for me, and I for them."

Barbecue became animated as he talked about his heroes—a series of nation-building revolutionaries. He mentioned Jean-Jacques Dessalines, Haiti's iconic first ruler, as well as the Burkinabe revolutionary Thomas Sankara, Fidel Castro, and Malcolm X. "I like Martin Luther King, too, but he didn't like fighting with guns, and I fight with guns," he said, with a short, explosive laugh.

Barbecue wore his ideology almost literally on his sleeve. He had on a large gold pendant and a matching ring with Masonic symbols, which he said marked him as "someone who was seeking the truth." On his cell-phone cover was a Pop Art image depicting him as Che Guevara, complete with beret. "I'm not a Communist," he explained. "I just like their philosophy. People who love their country. People who see the need to develop their country."

This was the root of his affinity with Dessalines, he said: "His dream was to share the country's riches with the little people. Today, a tiny group controls all the land, all its resources, its entire economy, while the majority lives in misery, in grime. Look at this neighborhood: we all live in misery, in grime. We have to fight to change that." Castro had pursued the same goals, he said: "He built schools, hospitals, universities."

When I asked Barbecue if he was evolving into a political figure, he gave another staccato laugh and pointed skyward. "That's the big architect who has all the power," he said. "I'm just one person who has a vision for my country. Haiti is a country of Blacks, but Haiti is a racist country. For example, there's never a Black who can have a supermarket, a Black who can own a house and a car. All those government posts, there's never a Black that has access to them; there's all this money, but it never comes back to them."

Barbecue blamed the island's inequities on what he called "the Lebanese"—Haitians of Syrian and Lebanese descent who constitute much of the economic élite, including food and fuel importers, bankers, and merchants. "We need to create a Black bourgeoisie," he said. "But all the riches of the country are in the hands of the five per cent, the oligarchs, the Lebanese." He complained that there wasn't even a good hospital in Port-au-Prince, "because when the oligarchs get sick they take private jets straight to Miami, where they are treated in Jackson Memorial

Hospital." He added, "It's those people we need to eliminate and come with another group in our country, who are credible—who are Haitian above all. *Those* people aren't Haitians, and they don't even like Haitians."

It is indisputably true that Black Haitians have suffered centuries of disenfranchisement. But, when Barbecue speaks of fighting on their behalf against the light-skinned élite, it inevitably evokes Duvalier, who used the tenets of *noirisme* to justify his violent rule. Indeed, Barbecue has spoken of admiring Papa Doc.

Last fall, as part of what Barbecue describes as his "fight for a better life," he led an armed blockade against the main Port-au-Prince fuel terminal of Varreux. For nearly two months, the capital suffered devastating fuel shortages and growing famine, even as a cholera epidemic spread. The blockade was ostensibly aimed at forcing Ariel Henry to resign, but all indications are that Barbecue was aiming to enrich his gang. Some Haitians speculate that he released the port only after reaching a secret agreement with Henry to supply government jobs for some of his men and to lift arrest warrants; others say that Henry simply paid him. (Both men deny this.) Someone with knowledge of the port's operations told me that the company that runs it didn't pay off Barbecue, but that it took care to hire its stevedores from areas he controlled, paying twice the going rate. He added that the stevedores "tithed" to their community leaders.

Although Barbecue presents himself as an enemy of the state, he is widely believed to have been linked to Moïse. He carried out his attacks on turf associated with Moïse's political rivals. And though he was a wanted criminal, he lived openly in Delmas, occasionally making public appearances with active-duty policemen. When I asked how he felt about the police, he gave a confiding look and said, "Once a policeman, always a policeman."

A diplomat in the region told me, "We had a strong suspicion that there was a connection between the gangs and the government at the highest level." Barbecue denied any links to Moïse. "I never met him, I never liked him," he told me, laughing roughly. "I liked him when he *died*." But after the assassination Barbecue appeared at a mourning ceremony attended by more than a thousand people. Dressed in a white suit and a black tie, he led a procession of gang members as they circled a bonfire and cast in salt to honor Moïse's memory.

In the course of our conversation, Barbecue told me that he had just one regret. "There are people who I don't want to see still alive," he said. He smirked, then offered a clarification: "I don't want to see them continuing to hurt Haiti." Despite his claims of nation-building, he seemed more like a bandit than like a revolutionary. "The notion of good and bad doesn't exist for me," he told me. "I do good for one group of people. I do bad for another. That's the law of life. The black and white. The equilibrium."

Barbecue blames Pierre Esperance, the executive director of the independent National Human Rights Defense Network, for the "false accusations" that cost him his job with the police. A sociologist by training, Esperance, a sturdy, bald-headed man of sixty, has been documenting abuses in Haiti for twenty-eight years. Having survived thus far, he is as outspoken as he is impatient. He describes Barbecue as "a killer, a gangster, a rapist," and as "a danger to human rights and democracy."

Esperance's headquarters, a squat villa in central Port-au-Prince, whirls with activity, as staffers attend to people who have come seeking help. In his office, I met a group of women from the community of Cabaret, an hour north of Port-au-Prince, who had survived an attack last November, as a gang sought revenge for the murder of one of its members by a local man. The women's stories had a terrible sameness. Gang members arrived suddenly at their houses, and took their brothers, husbands, fathers—and sometimes their mothers—into the street and murdered them. About fifty people in all were killed. The women were kept inside and raped in front of their children or their younger siblings. Afterward, the gang members torched the neighborhood. The women wept as they spoke of their desolation; all were living on the charity of friends or relatives in other slums, surviving by washing clothes or by selling candy on the streets.

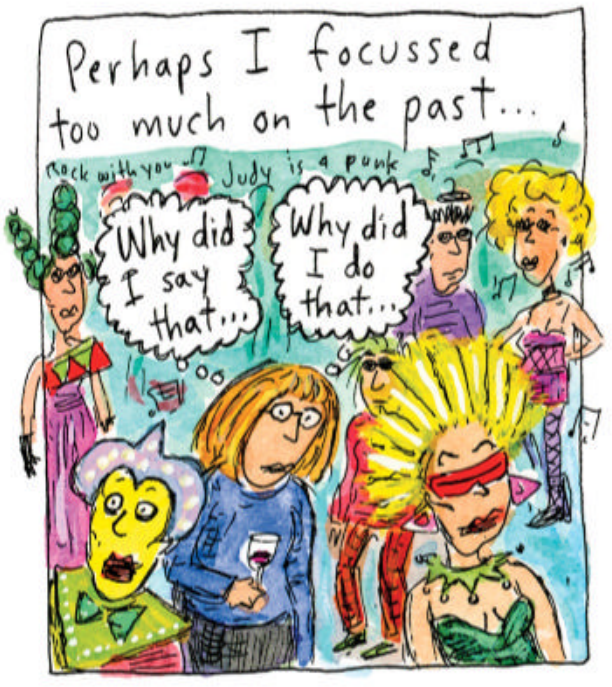
A young woman named Claudette, from the Port-au-Prince slum of Bel Air, told me that her district had been riven by fighting for several weeks, as a gang in Barbecue's G-9 alliance moved to take over a coveted well. Her family and their neighbors had been sleeping on the street, for protection. When I asked why it was safer outside, Claudette gave a surprised look and said, "Because when they come they burn our houses, and if we are inside we will burn, too."

Catherine, a strongly built woman with a baby girl in her arms, told me that she was from a section of Cité Soleil known as Brooklyn. In August, 2021, she was a twenty-seven-year-old widow with two young children, working in an industrial park. One evening, she was riding home in a group taxi when cars pulled in front of it and blocked the road. Masked gunmen leaped out and forced the passengers into the street. In an empty lot, the men started shooting, killing a little boy. Catherine cried softly as she recounted what happened next: the gang members beat her, yanked off her clothes, and raped her, over and over, for several hours. Catherine touched a scar on her face, where they had hit her with a gun. She didn't know who her tormentors were, because they wore masks. "There were other women raped at the same time," she said quietly. "One didn't make it."

Catherine spoke of the gangs that fought over Brooklyn without mentioning their names; it seemed not to matter much who they were, since they all behaved the same. But she deduced that the men who had raped her were from "the new gang," which had recently moved in. After displacing the previous gang, it blockaded the neighborhood, allowing no one in or out. "Since we couldn't leave and had no water, we drank sewage water," Catherine said. "Some people got cholera." The gang continued killing people and burning houses. Pierre Esperance said that his office had documented fifty-seven cases of rape in the neighborhood during that period.

When Catherine was finally able to leave Brooklyn, a month later, she walked to a facility run by Médecins Sans Frontières, where doctors told her that she was pregnant and that she had contracted syphilis. Catherine received medical treatment and psychiatric counselling, but

BAD AT BOHEMIA



R. Chast

she could not imagine bearing a child. In despair, she jumped from the roof of a two-story house, the highest elevation she could find. It was Mother's Day, 2022. When she woke up, she was in hospital, giving birth.

As it turned out, Catherine's baby was healthy except for a facial injury sustained during her mother's suicide attempt. "When she was four months old, I tried to give her away at a hospital," Catherine said. "A counsellor helped me. She told me I had a pretty baby." Catherine spoke plainly, allowing herself no sentiment. "Now I love this baby."

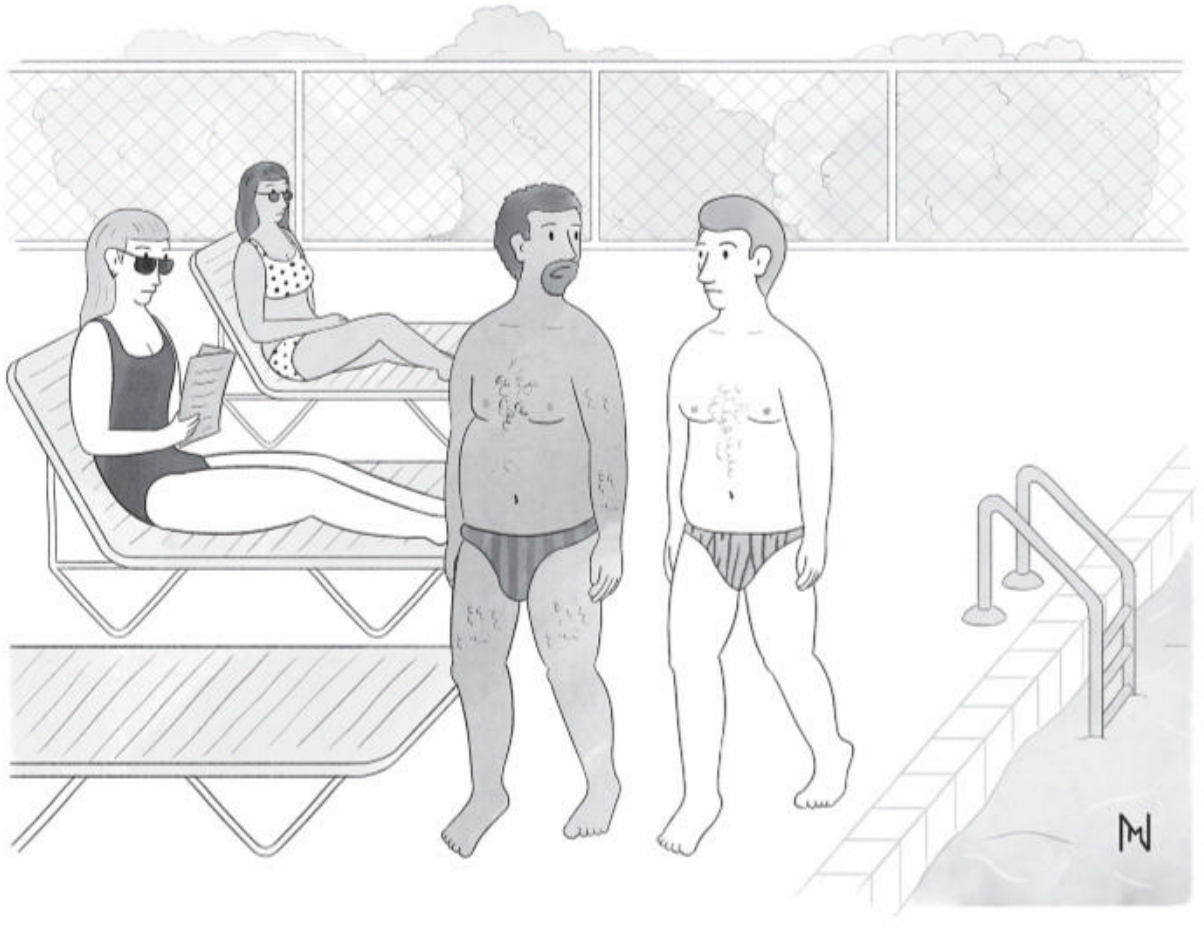
Her greatest hope, she said, was for "someone to help me." She had two other children who needed protection, so she had moved in with a man, but he was beating her. She pointed to places where he had hit her. "If I get help, I can move out and take care of my children," she said. "I am intelligent."

Haitians looking for official help are perpetually disappointed. The country has only about nine thousand police officers, many of whom are believed to be involved with gangs. "The police force is at the scale of the state—about five per cent of the needed capacity," the diplomat in the region said. The Army is effectively nonexistent, with some two thousand active troops. What spending the government can afford often goes to patronage. Despite a dismal economy, the diplomat added, "the employees of the civil service have increased by thirty per cent in the past five years, the result of the governments stacking the civil service with their party militants."

The Trump Administration showed little interest in Haiti. In an Oval Office meeting in 2018, Trump asked why the U.S. had to accept immigrants from Haiti and other "shithole countries." Joe Biden, during his long political career, has demonstrated little more concern. In 1994, when President Clinton was considering an intervention, Biden counselled against it: "If Haiti—a God-awful thing to say—if Haiti just quietly sunk into the Caribbean, or rose up three hundred feet, it wouldn't matter a whole lot in terms of our interests." During his Presidency, officials I've asked about the Administration's priorities in the Western Hemisphere tend to list Mexico, Brazil, and Venezuela—and to throw up their hands when I mention Haiti.

When I recently asked Brian Nichols, the Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, about Henry's plea for security assistance, he said that the Administration was working to build support in the U.N. Security Council, while remaining focussed on "insuring that the Haitian people be the protagonists in their own future." (A senior government official working in the region put it more directly: "Everyone agrees it has to be a Haitian solution, because if it is delivered from abroad everyone will say, 'The white man has spoken,' and it would be doomed not to last.") In mid-July, the Security Council agreed to develop options for consideration within thirty days. In the meantime, the U.S. is training some police, and has levied sanctions on various actors, including Barbecue—though sanctions are unlikely to produce an immediate effect on the street. When I mentioned them to Barbecue, he scoffed: "Morally, they don't bother me. Economically, they don't bother me, either, because I've never left Haiti."

Dan Foote, the former U.S. special envoy to Haiti, acknowledged that the situation was tenuous: "It's so bad now that people look wistfully back on the days of the Tonton Macoutes, when garbage was collected and their children played in the streets." Still, he noted that an intervention couldn't succeed unless the Haitian state was strengthened. "We try to build a government without a stable foundation and then it just fucks up," he said. "Haiti is going to be a generational challenge, but it's not insurmountable. We just need to help the Haitian people unfuck themselves. All they need is a leader."



"I hate it when they dress you with their eyes."

Ariel Henry is a reticent figure who has given few interviews since assuming his post, but he agreed to meet me in a secure government compound above Port-au-Prince. A tall man with a clipped salt-and-pepper beard, he was dressed soberly, in a black suit and glasses. Despite having served briefly as interior minister under Martelly, Henry is best known as Haiti's foremost neurosurgeon. For years, he was the island's equivalent of Anthony Fauci—the preëminent medical authority during the cholera epidemic that began in 2010, and again during the recent outbreak of COVID-19.

In a darkened living room with gold-and-silver curtains drawn over the windows, Henry spoke for nearly two hours. He said that he "never imagined" he would become Prime Minister, until Moïse approached him about the post

in 2021. Early that July, they'd had a long meeting, talking about the realities of governance: COVID-19, joblessness, forthcoming elections. "He said security was not an issue, that he had some plan for how to fight the gangs," Henry recalled. Moïse, who had only a few months left in office, seemed eager to maintain his influence, and asked to name two ministers in Henry's government. His wife, Martine, also asked to name one. At 11 o'clock on July 6th, Moïse called, sounding agitated, and asked why Henry hadn't finished assembling the new cabinet. "I told him it was because I hadn't been named yet," Henry recalled. A few hours later, he said, he was awakened by another call. There had been a break-in at the Presidential residence; Moïse had been shot twelve times.

It emerged that a group of assailants, including Colombian mercenaries, had made their way in with help from paid-off security men. Most of the mercenaries were soon captured, though three were killed in a firefight. The survivors said that they believed they were part of a "C.I.A. operation." Investigators eventually found that the operation was funded by a Haitian Chilean former drug trafficker, Rodolphe Jaar. Last month, Jaar was sentenced to life imprisonment in a Miami courtroom.

Still, rumors circulate in Haiti that others may have been involved. Moïse's wife, Martine, who was injured but not killed in the raid, has been the subject of speculation, as has Martelly, his estranged ally. (A lawyer for Martine denies that she had any involvement, or that she asked to name a minister. Martelly could not be reached for comment.) Ariel Henry has also been the object of suspicion. People mention that, in the hours after the killing, he spoke to Joseph Felix Badio, a former justice official who has been alleged to be a key architect of the plot. The diplomat in the region told me, "Henry has explained in a very awkward way that he doesn't remember the call." But, the diplomat added, this doesn't provide evidence of conspiracy. "He was already nominated to be Prime Minister," he said. "He's wealthy. He'd done surgery on everyone in Haiti. What would be his motivation?"

After Moïse's assassination, Henry quickly went into hiding. "If he had done something that led people to think the only solution was to kill him, then the same thing could happen to me," he said. He explained that this was why he had avoided media contacts. "Times were turbulent," he said. "There was a big campaign to associate me with the assassination. I had just become Prime Minister, and suddenly I was a criminal. I wasn't prepared for it. Now my skin is thicker," he said, laughing.

Henry's many critics regard him as illegitimate. When he took office, he displaced an ambitious young nationalist named Claude Joseph—a change that Moïse agreed to only under pressure from Martelly. Dan Foote, the former special envoy to Haiti, told me, "Martelly had been coming and going from Miami, where he was living, busting Moïse's balls. They have a meeting, after which Moïse basically signs the paper Martelly has handed him, naming Henry as his Prime Minister. He goes home after that and gets killed."

According to Foote and other observers, the U.S. Ambassador helped insure that Henry was appointed. "Henry is compliant," Foote said. "He gets in there, looks good, knows how to tie a tie." He has coöperated with the Biden White House to accept deportations of Haitian immigrants; he has assured I.M.F. officers that he is working to shore up the economy. The diplomat in the region told me, "He is trying to restore some institutionality in this country at a time when most institutions are no longer functioning. Justice is completely broken. There have been no criminal trials in five years. Education is very damaged."

Public sentiment is against him, though. Around the capital, you see graffiti reading, "Down with Henry!" He has been promising new elections for the past eighteen months, but no one seems to believe that he will hold them. Foote told me, "There is no social contract between the Haitian people and Henry, and, as long as he's in there, the crisis will continue. Every time he tries to engage with the gangs, they take his money and tell him to fuck off. The Haitians are embarrassed by him, because he can't get shit done."

In our conversation, Henry confessed to having no solution for the security problems in Port-au-Prince. He noted, with strained politeness, that Haiti had purchased some armored personnel carriers from a Canadian company, but they hadn't all arrived yet. "There have been quite a few—what do you call them, private contractors?—who have been offering their services," he said. He declined to give specifics, but said that they included some Americans and some Haitian Americans who had served in the U.S. military. "They are not proud of what's going on here, and they want to put together a force to fix the country," he said. "But we cannot accept. If you start there, you cannot predict the end."

When I asked how long Haiti could endure the current strife, he said, "Yesterday some industrialists came to see me, and they asked the same question. I said I couldn't speculate, but I didn't think we could go on for too much longer." Still, Henry said that he took comfort from a "deep feeling that the Haitian people can come up and astonish the world." He couldn't explain exactly what he meant, but said he felt hopeful that "peace would first take shape through a single spark and go on from there."

Other Haitian officials seemed less hopeful. One morning, I went to see Mirlande Manigat, one of the country's most respected public figures. Madame Manigat, as she is known, is eighty-two, an expert in constitutional law and the widow of a President who served for four months in the eighties before being ousted by the military. In 2010, Manigat ran for President herself, but lost to Martelly. She was now a co-leader of a Presidential transition council, whose office occupies an entire floor of a ministry in Port-au-Prince. When I arrived, the vast space was unfurnished except for a desk, a chair, and the Haitian flag. Manigat gave a mockingly expansive wave around and said, "We understand that others are looking to us and saying, 'What are you doing?'"

Her council's task, to propose changes to the electoral process and to the constitution, was stalled. "Nothing can be achieved until security is established, but security is nonexistent," she said. "If I were in power, I would declare a state of emergency." Henry had not done

"Yes! Wait, no . . . I mean no."

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so, but she thought that the justice department might have the power to do it without him. "We are in an urgent situation," she said. "We need the government to adopt certain measures, even if they are illegal." Manigat feared that it was "already too late."

Because of the sour legacy of the U.N. peacekeeping forces, she did not favor an international stabilization force. "The idea demoralizes Haitians," she said. "We know what happens." In any case, Manigat said, it was clear that the countries that had previously aided Haiti were now principally concerned with Ukraine. "We watch the news," she said. "We understand that the international community doesn't want to send troops to Haiti, to send their kids to die here—and I don't blame them."

Manigat believed that the Haitian military needed to be reconstituted to restore order. She had grown up in an Army family, she said, and didn't "suffer from the same revulsion many people have toward the military." But there were obstacles, including the fact that the U.S. Congress had placed an arms embargo on the Haitian military. Manigat argued that the U.S. could ask other countries—she mentioned Israel and Egypt—to provide arms. Wryly, she added, "We don't have a very sophisticated Army, so the Army wouldn't need very sophisticated weapons."

She was unconcerned by the possibility of human-rights violations. "When you are dealing with bandits, human rights don't apply," she said. "What do we have to do, implore them for mercy? No, we should show them no consideration, just as they do with us." Manigat spoke about Che Guevara, who died in Bolivia, in a battle with forces supported by the U.S. "His cadaver was exposed, and everyone saw that Guevara had died," she said. "Here the bandits have names—we all know who they are—and their bodies need to be exposed as well, so as to shock the population. The body dies from the head."

Nearly everyone I spoke to in Haiti agreed that defeating the gangs would require loosening laws. The country's interim justice minister, a novelist named Emmelie Prophète, met me at a café on the grounds of a luxury hotel where the U.N. has its headquarters. Prophète was guarded by two edgy-seeming security men.

I asked about a controversial recent statement, in which she had said that citizens should be allowed to take the law into their own hands in self-defense. Prophète laughed and nodded. "It was after a series of brutal home invasions and kidnappings," she explained. "A lot of people had been raped and killed, and many people had been writing me to ask whether, if they had weapons, they could defend themselves. I said yes!" Prophète added, "People are fed up with politics. People want security."

In April, reports of vigilante groups began to emerge. Civilians sealed off their streets and prepared to fight. In Port-au-Prince, people began lynching and burning gang members. The Bwa Kale movement was born.

Bwa Kale touts itself as a spontaneous civic phenomenon, but it clearly has backing from the police. In videos of the most explosive early attack, in which fourteen suspected gang members were beaten and burned alive, uniformed policemen can be seen kicking prostrate men as a jeering crowd gathers to throw tires on top of them. Foote confirmed that the police supported Bwa Kale: "They're outgunned, so they have no other options."

One afternoon, the head of the National Union of Haitian Police, Lionel Lazarre, came to my hotel, just after attending a funeral for three policemen who had been killed by gangs. He confirmed that gangs controlled as much as ninety-five per cent of the capital, and conceded that the police were incapable of defeating them. But, he said, if the population supported them, and if the private sector and the government could "put their hands in their pockets to get them the resources they needed," things could improve. (The diplomat in the region reluctantly agreed: "If we can get a military intervention force here in a reasonable amount of time, we can have some results. The gangs will not be defeated in twenty-four hours, but they will take a step back. If there isn't one, then we have no choice but to rebuild the police.")

I asked about Muscadin, the regional authority who had reportedly defeated the gangs by indiscriminate force. "I don't have a problem with his work," Lazarre said. "Of course, people's rights need to be respected. But some people say if we had several Muscadins maybe

we wouldn't have the problems we have today." Yet he declined to disavow Barbecue. "He was pushed into what he is now by human-rights organizations," he said. "I can't judge that one way or the other. But life has its turnarounds, and, because of the situation we're in, it could be that there may be those who could ask for an amnesty for him, in return for a change in his behavior."

The advent of Bwa Kale had put Barbecue in a curious position. Though the vigilantes had pledged to fight the gangs, many of those they fought were also Barbecue's enemies. And the police, to whom he had at least a sentimental allegiance, seemed to support them. When we spoke, I asked whether he was going to align himself with Bwa Kale. Laughing, he said, "That's a strategic question." Rather than expanding, he spoke enigmatically about how the conflict might play out: "It was vodou that gave Haiti its independence, and it will liberate this country again." Gesturing broadly, he said, "The spirits of our ancestors, despite everything that's been done, continue to watch over us. Haiti will shake off all the dirt and once more become the Pearl of the Antilles."

On May 18th, Flag Day in Haiti, Barbecue appeared before a crowd, wearing a T-shirt emblazoned with "Bwa Kale." He gave an impassioned speech saluting the heroes of independence, describing his alliance of gangs as an extension of their struggle. He also hailed Bwa Kale, though he warned its members to "avoid collateral damage." He assured the crowd, "If there is any collateral damage, that's not us."

Barbecue went on, "We G-9 have no problem with Bwa Kale. I say to the people, 'Stay firm with Bwa Kale, because Bwa Kale is giving results.' There's no team that will give results like Bwa Kale. Bwa Kale all the way!"

In the weeks after Bwa Kale formed, kidnappings declined in the capital, and there was a surge of wary optimism. But the presence of another armed group seems unlikely to bring an enduring peace to Haiti. "The basic truth is that there is no state," the diplomat in the region said. "It is gone, and to rebuild it will be very slow."

One of the most contested front lines in the gang wars that have reshaped Port-au-Prince runs through Cité Soleil—a sprawling slum, which came into being in the nineteen-fifties, when American companies built factories in Haiti without also erecting housing for the workers. Barbecue's turf borders an area dominated by an enemy gang called G-Pep. One afternoon, I was escorted there by Sean Roubens Jean Sacra, a Haitian journalist who had cultivated a relationship with members of the gang. We made our way by a little-used road, bounded by weedy vacant land and an old concrete wall that marked a no man's land between the gangs' territories. Near a crude lookout tower, young men with guns surrounded the car threateningly, until Sacra explained in Creole that their leader had sanctioned our trip.

Down the road, in front of a wall painted with a portrait of a dead gang member, G-Pep members hustled us onto motorbikes, and we roared off into the slum, riding for ten minutes through a trough with a deep sluice of raw sewage. People with bundles on their heads leaped aside as we passed, but nobody complained to the gang members, or even dared to make eye contact.

The sewer opened into a stretch of roadside shanty-shops, where a heavyset young man was waiting—G-Pep's third-in-command. He was in cellphone contact with the leader, Gabriel Jean-Pierre, but our presence had evidently not been entirely approved. Soon after we arrived, a crew of young men rode up on motorbikes and began to argue with the local boss.

Sacra told us to stay out of sight during the negotiations, so we stood behind a cinder-block hut, where a man was burning charcoal in an oil drum. In the shade, a woman cut a young man's hair; he held a broken piece of mirror to review her handiwork. A mentally impaired man wandered through the alley. Children swarmed around.

After fifteen minutes, we were allowed to proceed to a packed neighborhood of shacks built out of corrugated tin and scrap metal. While the gang members kept watch outside, we were allowed in. The shacks had dirt floors, with open fires in the corners, rudimentary beds, and shelves for a few possessions. The heat inside was ferocious.

The residents, nearly all women, said that they didn't have enough food, and that they faced persistent danger. One of them, a sixty-year-old former domestic worker, who wore a faded tunic decorated with pink roses, explained, "We can't sleep well. There is no water—we get a little when it rains. There is no government presence here. We live like animals. The only way in and out is the sewer, the way you came in, but you can get killed if you try and leave. These guys"—she waved toward the street—"can take you and kill you behind the wall." The killing was done at the corner where we had met the G-Pep sentinels. "We are prisoners here. Animals have more value than we do." (In the days after our visit, fighting nearby killed more than eighty people, as Barbecue forced out a rival leader.)

Outside, the gang leader was waiting to escort us to the front line. Gesturing for silence, he led the way through a labyrinth of narrow alleys until we reached an open area, bounded on one side by the ocean, still and dank, and on the other by a clutch of bullet-riddled tin houses. In front of us was the front line, marked by a jerry-built cinder-block wall, about ten feet high, that ran all the way to the sea.

The gang leader hustled us to the wall, looking out for enemy fighters. At the base was a small vodou altar: an effigy of a Catholic saint, surrounded by conch shells. Nearby, several of his men sat in the shade of a small blockhouse, holding automatic weapons. A hole in the wall gave a view of a copse of trees and a few oil-storage silos—G-9 territory, Barbecue's turf.

One of the guards, a skinny young man whose face was obscured by a mask patterned with an American flag, came out of the guardhouse, carrying a sawed-off shotgun. I asked if he was a fighter at the front line. He nodded, and said that he was. When I asked what he was fighting for, he paused for a moment and then mumbled in Creole. Sacra translated: "He said he doesn't know why. He is just here." ♦

The Maths Tutor • *Tessa Hadley*

ILLUSTRATION BY EVE LIU

In her thirties, Lorraine was unfaithful once or twice; she didn't tell her husband. Quentin owed her, she reckoned, in that long accounting of pluses and minuses which is marriage. Owed her not only because he was unfaithful, too—although he certainly had been, she didn't doubt it, and more than once or twice—but also because he was impossible. He was one of those impossible men, attractive but also sleazy, in a way that was more popular then, in the eighties and nineties, than it is now. He was long-limbed and superskinny, fizzing and jigging and restless with energy, his ugly sharp face alight with cleverness and mockery of everything. Nowadays he wouldn't get away with it. Quent didn't once, not ever, attend any of the parents' evenings at their children's schools, or cook a meal for the family, or use the vacuum cleaner. If he took the children out it was on some crazy, risky adventure, not to buy shoes. Usually, anyway, he was high on some illegal substance or another. When Lorraine thought of him, that was how she pictured him: deep in concentration, his long hair falling forward around his face dipped to the toke, his hand cupped around the lighter flame, his gracile long fingers stained with nicotine. Sometimes he fried up steaks with herbs and wine when they had friends round to eat, and everyone was amazed by his culinary skills; it was all so delicious. He paid a fortune once, at a time when they were so short of money, for a good suit lined in purple silk, sewn by a tailor who made suits for the Rolling Stones.

Why shouldn't Lorraine have her bit of pleasure? Her affairs buoyed her up, when the reality of her days was mostly the slog of child care, worrying about the children's happiness and rushing around picking up plates and toys and dirty clothes from the floor before she went off to work. Quent was a musician. He knew a lot of people and got to play keyboards with some of the old sixties bands still on the scene and some of the punk bands. But it was Lorraine's steady, modest income, as an administrator in the admissions office at a polytechnic, that kept the wolf from the door. But the wolf wasn't at the door, she thought then, with that sort of grimly satisfied, righteous outrage it was too easy to get addicted to. The wolf was inside the house! She put the wolf's clothes in the washing machine and nursed him when he was sick. The wolf slept beside her in the marital bed.

So she helped herself to her affairs, in a spirit of compensation. She could still get the men to look at her if she wanted to, with her slight figure and home-bleached hair, in a punky cut; she was good at finding striking clothes in the charity shops. Quent would never have chosen her if she hadn't had a certain style; he was even loyal to her in his way. Lorraine had clear skin, a long, straight nose, blue eyes set rather far apart; her expression was surprised and amused, as if she had just been woken up but was ready for anything. Men liked her straightforwardness and freshness, her good sense.

The daughter of a noncommissioned Army officer, she'd grown up in Aden and Malta and Germany. Her mother died when she was thirteen; her older sister married into the military. Lorraine was rootless and all but estranged from her family. Even if her father and sister had wanted to get together with Quent, he'd have refused to have anything to do with them; he said the old man was a Fascist and her sister was too fucked up—he couldn't be bothered with them. Which was convenient for him, whereas Lorraine had to expend a lot of energy looking out for Quent's raddled, boozy, hurtful old mother, who didn't like children and called Lorraine "the Domestic Goddess," which she meant unkindly, although she tucked readily enough into the meals Lorraine cooked. She'd once said out loud to Quent, in front of Lorraine, that his wife had a doll's face and her tastes were suburban.

Once a year, Lorraine took the children on the coach to see her father, who was retired and living in Scarborough. Quent and his mother were supposedly very left-wing and loved the working classes, but Lorraine's dad was working class and they didn't love him. When she was a girl she'd made herself ill with her passionate opposition to her father's attitudes and his politics, but she didn't bother to argue with him now; it wasn't worth it. She saw how he was bound to think along those lines, given the life he'd had. And all the time, at the back of her awareness, she cherished the secret of the little flame of her love affairs and her greedy sensuous self, as if these were a kind of counterargument to her father's intransigence and his loneliness. Generally, though, she treated the whole business lightly. There was no heartbreak in those affairs; no one promised anything. They were her little flings. The serious business of her life was at home with her children.

Then, in her forties, just as everything became more dangerous—her father died, her body changed and grew heavier, and her feelings were dragged down, too, as if by the same gravitational force—Lorraine was ready to embark on another affair. This time she seemed to be risking everything; so much more was at stake. Her children were in their teens now, and her two daughters were coming into their own beauty, poised and resplendent as spring narcissi; their perfection made her feel ashamed of something flawed and unfinished in herself. Her son, Calum, was preparing for his maths G.C.S.E., and he had the same cold, panicky sweats over figures that she'd once had. She and Quent agreed to hire a tutor from an agency. They couldn't really afford it, but Lorraine was determined not to let Calum fail maths as she had done. The tutor came to their house in the evening and sat at the kitchen table with Lorraine and Calum, explaining how they would prepare for the exam. She'd thought that the tutor would be a young man, just out of university, and was disappointed at first when she saw him on the doorstep, burdened and slightly stooped, brown hair sprinkled with gray; she was afraid that he might be boring. The tutor laughed at the pair of them, sitting there at the table so unhappily, just because of maths.

"Don't be afraid," he said. "Trust me."

He was very gentle, looking from one to the other, spreading out his hands, palms up, toward them on the table, as if he were offering them something. He'd printed out lots of past exam papers. "If the cost, C pence, of printing party invitations is given by $C=120+40n$, and n is the number of invites . . ."

Calum sighed and ran his fingers melodramatically up his face into his

white-blond hair, pushing it up in tufts. "I'd never even have a party," he said. "And if I did I'd just ask people. Word of mouth."

Lorraine remembered when Calum was a baby, so adorably eager and tender. Now he said "arks" instead of "ask," and "mouf," in the school patois, which was meant to annoy her and shut her out, though in fact she took pride in his navigation of the treacherous world of school.

"Let's see what your mother thinks," the tutor said. "Let's see if she can work it out."

At every step of their session he involved Lorraine, and she understood that this was partly a technique to take the pressure off Calum. The tutor—whose name was Greg—calmed Lorraine down, so that she could see the numbers plainly, and then, while Lorraine went slowly through the working-out, Calum often arrived at the answer ahead of her. But it wasn't only a technique, she thought. It was also because Greg's nature was considerate; he was careful to include everyone in the room. Shyly, when their hour was up, she handed him an envelope with the money in it, and asked if he'd like to stay for a coffee; he said that would be nice, he wasn't in a hurry. Calum escaped upstairs to watch telly. He wasn't supposed to have a television in his room, but he'd smuggled in a tiny battered portable, with a twisted coat hanger for an aerial, which he'd got from one of his friends whose parents were throwing it out.

Lorraine and Greg talked about the fear that so many people had of maths and numbers. "It isn't the inability that produces the fear," he said. "It's almost always the other way round—the fear produces the inability. So it's a matter of conjuring away the fear, like blowing away a fog. Then you can see the numbers for what they are."

"Well, it worked with me," she said. "I'm surprised. I really quite enjoyed myself."

"Perhaps you'll sit in again next week?"

"I'd like to, if you don't mind. I think it helped Calum."

She guessed that Greg was in his late thirties, quite a few years younger than her, just young enough to not look dowdy in his faded, rumpled shirt, worn through at the collar—he obviously never gave a thought to his clothes. His head was round and shapely, like a classical drawing of a boy, gray-brown hair cut short above the ears; he was boyish in his straightness and his frankness, speaking very sincerely and looking directly at her. Lorraine got out of him that he was married to a Frenchwoman but they were separated, with one child, a boy of six. Mostly he'd worked as an anthropologist, he said, but he'd always been good at statistics, hence the maths tutoring. He had lived with his wife in Mali and then Senegal, but now he'd come home to make a new life for himself in the U.K. He liked teaching and might train to be a teacher, so that he could have his son to stay during the school holidays; he didn't mind living alone, although he missed his son. He liked his own company, doing things in his own time. In fact, the solitude was a relief, after the last months of his marriage.

"Marriage, huh?" Lorraine said sympathetically. "There ought to be a health warning."

But she could tell that Greg was drawn to their family life in that too small, arty, untidy, comfortable home in Kensal Rise: political posters on the wall, earthenware mugs on the kitchen table, piano piled up with music, beautiful girls popping in and out. He probably would have been drawn to Quent, too, if Quent had been around—needless to say, he wasn't. When Greg had gone, Lorraine sat at the table with a glass of wine, going over some of the maths problems they'd solved together and deriving a pleasure, for the first time in her life, from the numbers whose relationships were set out so exactly and so transparently.

"Walk faster—I just realized I gave that woman the wrong directions, and now I feel responsible for every bad thing that will ever happen to her."

Over the next weeks she fell thoroughly in love, for the first time ever. This was different from the old half-antagonistic games of flirtation and advantage. She'd never even been in love with Quent in this way; she'd only been bowled over by his seduction, which was an entrance into a bigger life. Quent had shown her how to

escape the narrowness and unhappiness of her home, and she was grateful for that. He'd set a high watermark for living audaciously and taking what you wanted for yourself. And now what she wanted was the quiet maths tutor, who sat patiently at her kitchen table, going over vectors and isosceles triangles with her and Calum.

Usually Greg stayed when their session was over, to have a coffee with her, or a glass of wine, and then they talked so easily together. He must surely have felt it, too: how in tune they were. They were both gentle and careful and alert, not unjudgmental. Greg was steady and decent, delicate in his perceptions. She loved his wholeness and his self-possession, his head bent diligently over the maths papers, his lean young jaw, his enthusiasm when Calum grasped some new concept. Love flooded in her like a spill of paint, blooming across her consciousness and through all her sensations, staining everything with its brilliant vermillion. She was sure that Greg liked her. But did he feel anything more? He was relieved to have someone he could talk to. Because he'd been away from England for so long, he'd lost touch with a lot of his old friends; he hinted that his wife had been difficult, and had alienated some of them. His smile was bruised and tentative when he spoke about his wife. He wasn't unkind, but there was something inexorable and final in his assessment of her.

Quent came home once while she and Greg were talking, and sat down to roll up and drink wine with them, entertaining them. He told funny stories about his maths teacher at school, how he used to grope the boys' genitals while they wrote out sums on the blackboard; he was called Chalky because he left chalk handprints on their trousers. "I can see how that might put you off," Greg said.

"Fucking aversion therapy. If I hear 'quadratic equation,' or 'volume of a cone,' or 'income-tax return,' I get a pain in my balls."

Lorraine had heard this story often before. "That's your convenient excuse," she said.

"Blame it on old Chalky."

Quent either ignored new people as if they didn't exist or he set out to charm them. He told Greg how at fifteen he'd got himself chucked out of his horrible boarding school for selling dope, then had never gone back into education, had lived by his wits. And by *my* wits, Lorraine thought. She sensed that Greg was watching Quent like an anthropologist, studying his type even as he enjoyed Quent's flamboyant energy and jokes. Afterward, she wanted to explain everything that was wrong with Quent, but she knew that Greg wouldn't like that. He'd listen, but he'd be disappointed in her if she descended to merely complaining about her husband. That would be bad form. It was all right for him to drop hints about his wife, because they were separated. And, as for Quent, he'd forgotten Greg by the next day. When Lorraine mentioned that she was going to meet Greg for a drink at lunchtime, to talk about Calum's exams, he looked at her quite blankly. *Who*?

She was helpless with love by then. This lunchtime meeting was a test; surely, as Greg had agreed to come, he must be feeling something. He couldn't be such an innocent as to believe that she really just wanted to discuss Calum's exams, could he? Lorraine seemed to feel attraction flowing between them slowly and sweetly and inexorably; their talk was wholly innocent and friendly, but they couldn't stop smiling whenever their eyes met. She told him about the garrison schools she'd attended in Malta and Germany, and called herself a Forces Brat. Greg hadn't heard the term before; he was interested in it, and in her past, her childhood. And he told her about his research in Mali, on the country's rural communes and its rich corpus of customary law; he explained that he'd left because of the war and the pressure, once field work became impossible, to supply analysis almost as an arm of international intelligence, which wasn't what he'd gone into anthropology for. "The whole discipline's eating itself, anyway," he said. "No one knows who's got the right to study whom. I suspect that my heart isn't in it anymore." He laughed. "Now you're making a face like Calum did when I talked to him about algebra."

"What kind of face? What does it look like?"

"Suspicious? Faintly hostile?"

"But I'm not hostile. It's just that fear again, like with the maths. Because I don't understand your work, so I feel stupid and ignorant."

He reassured her: why should she know about the politics of Mali? She should never be ashamed of not knowing something. "There are plenty of things I'm afraid of, too," he said. When they stood up to leave the pub and Greg helped her on with her coat, putting his arm around her to settle it on her shoulders, she was ready to sink to her knees with desire. She wanted to lean back then and there into his embrace, and reach up her mouth to be kissed, but didn't quite have the nerve—in case she was just deluded and imagining it all, or in case she was too old for him, or not good-looking enough. He seemed blindingly youthful and beautiful to her that afternoon. The two glasses of wine she'd drunk played a part, no doubt, in this whirlpool of sensations. Lorraine thought, If I don't see him again, after Calum's exam, I'll die. Her life would be stopped up, as if a blood clot had blocked the passage of blood from her heart to her body.

She was cunning in her necessity, scheming to find a way for them to meet. When she handed Greg the usual envelope with his money in it, after the last maths lesson, there was a message tucked inside. Luckily, he never opened the envelope in front of her, always took it home with him unopened. In the message she gave him the address of a flat in Notting Hill, and let him know that she'd be staying there alone, cat-sitting for a friend, on a certain date in a couple of weeks. Quent was taking Calum off to a festival that weekend, and the girls were going to Greece with the family of a schoolmate, but it wouldn't have felt right, inviting Greg into the family home. Lorraine had confided in her friend Carol, a single woman

who knew about those other affairs, and had promised to vacate her flat. There really was a cat.

In her note she didn't spell out, of course, that she wanted Greg to come to the flat to make love to her and spend the night with her. She simply wrote that she'd like to see him again, and cook him a meal to thank him properly for everything he'd done for Calum. She was at a loose end that weekend, she said, with all the family away. She'd asked him to come at seven. *No need to confirm, just turn up if you're free. If not, I'll curl up with the cat and put on a video or something.* But surely he would have let her know if, for some practical reason, he couldn't be there?

On her way to the flat Lorraine shopped for food and wine and gin, spending extravagantly; she'd chosen an easy recipe for spiced lamb fillet with spinach and dried cranberries. If she cooked in advance, she could shower and get dressed in plenty of time before Greg arrived. Carol had a good job with a women's magazine; the flat was on the first floor of a Georgian terrace. It was tranquil and elegant, sparsely furnished with antiques and treasures and a few striking pictures; sunshine lay in patches on faded rugs on the bare boards. Lorraine pulled up the windows and put flowers in a vase. She made herself at home in Carol's kitchen, preparing the food, while the tall old tabby strode about uneasily, rubbing his face against the table legs to leave his scent, only half accepting her intrusion. Then she showered and got ready in the bedroom, in the thick yellow evening light, putting on the clothes she'd chosen so carefully: flattering and sexy but not too blatant or too dressy.

It was half past six. She made herself a gin-and-tonic for courage, put Joni Mitchell on the CD player and took it off again—too feminine—and put on Miles Davis instead. She had absolutely no idea of Greg's taste in music. Yet his presence was so vivid in her anticipation that she moved suavely and sensuously, as if he were already watching her.

This was all before mobile phones, and she hadn't given Greg Carol's landline number. Just giving him the address had seemed more tasteful somehow, like dropping a clue for the hero of a fairy tale to follow. Nonetheless, as time passed she couldn't help fixing her attention on Carol's phone, as if it might ring, after all—and then it did ring, and she leaped for it, but it was only someone calling for Carol. By then it was seven-thirty. She poured herself a glass of wine, and then another, and didn't put on any more music when the Miles CD was finished. And then it was eight o'clock, and then eight-thirty. Her empty stomach hurt from drinking, but she wasn't hungry and couldn't possibly eat by herself the food she'd prepared for the two of them. She couldn't put on the television, either, or read a book: she didn't want to break her concentration; she was holding herself ready for whatever came next. The cat had got used to her and tried to climb into her lap. Outside, the light faded and Lorraine felt in her own body the shock of each footstep on the street, approaching and receding. By half past nine, she knew that Greg wasn't coming. She cut herself a slice of the cheesecake she'd bought in case he wanted pudding. At half past ten, she took off the clothes she'd put on with such high hopes, climbed into Carol's bed, made up with scented sheets, and fell asleep at once.

Her first thought when she woke in the morning was that she must conceal what had not happened from Carol. So she washed two unused dinner plates and two sets of knives and forks and

glasses in the kitchen sink, left these ostentatiously on the draining board; she stripped the bed and put the sheets in the washer-dryer, left a card by the flowers thanking Carol, signed with kisses and an exclamation mark, put the uneaten food in a Tupperware container to take home with her. She was almost jubilant with humiliation, skinned and turned inside out with it. Nothing worse could have happened—except in the real world, of course, where there were so many far worse possibilities. In her own subjectivity, however, she was done for—and this was strangely simplifying. The mental anguish was a problem like a physical wound, a torn ligament or a broken ankle, and she had to arrange herself around it, focussing not on the wound but on the process of getting about in spite of it. It was all very well to say that you would die. But in the meantime you had to go on living. Double-locking Carol's door behind her, Lorraine locked up some might-have-been-significant portion of herself, pushing it deep down inside, where it was lost. On the tube, she thought that everyone could see her shame, written on her face. She seemed to take up residence, then, in some front part of her mind, behind her eyes, where perception was shrewd and hard and shallow.

Calum passed his maths exam. Lorraine got him to sign a card with their thanks, and sent it care of the agency, which must have passed it on because Greg sent back a postcard addressed to Calum, with nothing on the back except his congratulations. And that was that. Because Calum had his maths G.C.S.E., he decided to stay on into the sixth form. He wouldn't admit it, but Lorraine thought that he was proud of himself for passing.

And Lorraine was sitting tight all this time, up at the front of her mind, viewing her life with a new, unforgiving clarity. Quent had come home from the festival as high as a kite, but she'd waited it out, and when he was ready they had a serious talk. She didn't want to carry on the way they were, she said, scrimping and saving and doing without. He was a lazy clever bastard, but she had an idea about how they could use his talents and contacts to make money. He knew so many people in the music business and in music publishing, and he'd been talking recently about the sound guys who were playing around with the new technology. There were going to be changes in the way that recorded music was consumed: young people were starting to listen to MP3s.

"Fucking hell, Lorraine," Quent said. "*Consumed*? What are you? A capitalist or something?"

"Yes, well, whatever. But isn't there

some way you could get into that? Couldn't you set up some kind of business, being a liaison between the computer guys and the creatives?"

She could tell that he saw what she meant. But it would never have come to anything without her pushing him, following up on the connections he made, bringing people together to make plans at the little house in Kensal Rise. Lorraine sat in on all their meetings as an equal partner; Quent complained that she was always "on his case." They got a genius tech guy involved, and an old school friend of Quent's who was in finance, and they built a platform where users listened for free but the artists could sell copies of their music. Quent brought in some prestige bands, and for a couple of years they did crazily well. When Calum finished his A levels, he came to work for his parents. Even after the tech bubble burst, and the platform was sold to a bigger, blander European company, Quent and Lorraine came out of it with money. Lorraine's own finances were watertight; she'd made sure that everything was in both their names.

They'd been so busy in those years that they hadn't had time to organize a move from Kensal Rise, though that had always been the intention. Now Lorraine dedicated herself to finding the right house in the right place. She got a good bargain, an Edwardian end-of-terrace in Stoke Newington that needed a lot of work; it even had outbuildings in the yard, which could be converted into a studio for Quent. During the six months before the work was finished and they were able to move in, Lorraine took great pleasure in spending the money she'd set aside for redoing the house. Nothing rash: it turned out that she had a gift for financial management. There would be plenty left over for them to enjoy a comfortable life style, even if they never started another business—and she and Calum already had a few ideas. In the meantime, though, there was something almost religious in her dedication to choosing things for their new home. She stared into half-finished rooms where the builders were still at work, trying to attain in her imagination to some dream atmosphere that was just out of reach, a subtle shadowed space in which at last she could be sophisticated and complete. And she felt the great good luck of her money almost voluptuously, running fabrics for curtains and upholstery between her fingertips, scouring through dirty reclamation yards for encaustic floor tiles and enamel sinks and brass door fittings, trying the patina of old wood, the thick plush of rugs. She left the art up to Quent, who was better at it.

"Oh, man, I forgot to stretch, ever."

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On the last morning in their old house in Kensal Rise, when everything they wanted to take with them had been packed into boxes ready for the removal men, a letter arrived for Lorraine. She knew immediately what it was, even before she took in the handwriting on the envelope, recognizable from the maths problems Greg used to set Calum for homework. Her first instinct, on picking the letter up from the doormat, was to get rid of it without reading it. Who wrote letters anymore? Its arrival on that very day was an absurdly melodramatic blow from a life she was leaving behind; she crumpled it quickly into her coat pocket. She was going to drive to the new house, to be there when the removal van arrived; Quent was supposed to oversee the loading at this end. Right now he was blocking the narrow hall, annoying Lorraine by going unnecessarily through the black bags full of rubbish that she'd sorted for Calum to take to the tip. Quent was surprisingly sentimental, it turned out, about their shared family past. "You can't get rid of *this*," he'd exclaim in astonishment, holding up a tattered program from some gig he'd once played, or one of the girls' skateboards from when that was a fad, or a football shirt that Calum had loved when he was eleven.

She kept her coat on at first when she got to the new house, which smelled of fresh paint and was chilly until the heating kicked in around the radiators. Walking through the spacious, high-ceilinged rooms she was half preoccupied

with the arrangements for the move, half aware of the letter burning in her pocket, paining and tantalizing her. It hardly seemed possible to connect the owner of this gracious place with the woman who'd once believed she was so desperately in love. Obviously, it would be best to throw the letter away unread. On the other hand, if she was going to read it she ought to do so now, before her family rushed in to fill up this emptiness. Afraid and impatient, Lorraine stopped her pacing abruptly, pulled out the letter, and tore open the envelope. Even the paper inside was disappointing: the same childish sheets of blue Basildon Bond her father had once used. Everything about the letter was wrong. It sounded nothing like the Greg she had once counted on. Wasn't she a thousand years older than anyone who could choose to write like this, in blue Biro, with a Boy Scout's solemnity: "I know I've left it a long time to write to you . . . difficult position professionally . . . respected you too much as a friend . . . believed you might come to regret . . ." This stodgy conventional language was repulsive to Lorraine. And the letter, which pretended to be an apology, was in fact only further humiliation. Greg wasn't proposing another meeting, or any renewal of contact; primly, like some maiden lady afraid of pursuit, he hadn't even put his address at the top of the page. He did let her know that he'd trained as a teacher and had a job at a certain school, so she could have traced him if she were desperate. But she wasn't desperate. On the contrary.

Lifting her head from the letter, Lorraine was pleased with this room which would be their new sitting room, with its rose-colored linen curtains already hanging at the windows and some of her new furniture installed—a charcoal-gray deep sofa and a glass-topped ultra-modern coffee table. She felt safe from the past, in this present so enticing all around her. Shoving the letter back into her pocket, she went upstairs to hang up her coat. It was a lovely heavy coat, in oatmeal tweed. Slipping its weight from her shoulders in the bedroom, feeling the sleeves' lining slick along her arms, she turned to catch sight of herself in the wardrobe mirror, aware of the waft of her perfume. Then catastrophically—but only for one long devastating moment, before she was all right again—she was ambushed by the sensation of something lost, lost forever and never to be restored, because it was too late, and life was time. If only Greg had wanted her, she thought. Then she might have had some other self now, instead of this one—so polished, impervious, capable. She might have been softer and more trusting and open in her middle age, more submissive to possibility—abandoned to possibility, submerged in it. She might have loved a man who was—because now she was remembering Greg as she had wanted him, in spite of the letter—open and generous himself, and imaginative, so that he could really see her, just as she saw him. But all that was soppy nonsense and wishful thinking. Of course it was.

Quentin insisted on carrying things into the new house alongside the removal men, running upstairs with boxes on his shoulder like a twenty-year-old, although Calum refused to be impressed. Setting down a box marked for the master bedroom, he paused to get his breath back, looking out the window and then noticing Lorraine's coat on its hanger. Out of sheer habit—which habit would that be? From boarding school, where you had to be on the lookout for every advantage over the other boys? Or from the late aftermath of parties, where you were feeling for anybody's stash to smoke?—he ran his hands idly into his wife's coat pockets. Partly he just liked the feel of the good tweed and the satin lining. He found the letter from Greg, read it, and took in what it meant—though he had no idea who Greg was—then put it back again.

So that changed everything. He had taken it for granted always, without giving it much thought, that Lorraine was a devoted wife. No, not devoted, because that made her sound stupid and stolid. She was source of his safety, ground of his strength, essential counterbalance to his mother. For the first time in years, his wife clicked into sharper focus for him.

Quent knew at once that he wouldn't say anything to Lorraine about the letter, not ever. In any case, what could he say? It sounded as though nothing had happened. He couldn't quite pick up the story from between the lines, but the guy seemed to have been inadequate to the occasion, whatever it was. Strangely, he hardly cared about the guy; it was Lorraine he was afraid of. He stood in that bare room where there was only a wardrobe and a bed and a few boxes, and understood that he didn't know her. Her physical presence and her demeanor—plump, neat, pliant figure and worn pink complexion, quickly amused irony, clear musical voice with that high catch in it like laughter—were as familiar to him as breathing. But he had no idea what was going on behind her eyes, inside her mind. He might as well be moving in with a stranger, sleeping beside a stranger in her bed.

The girls came in the evening to look over the house, and Calum ordered takeaway. They ate sitting around the old kitchen table, which was temporarily in the new kitchen, while they waited for a new table to be custom-made. Quent was in his studio, sorting out his sound system; they rang his mobile to tell him to come and eat. "I mean, first things first, Mum," one of the girls said dryly. "Never mind finding the kettle or the bedsheets or plumbing in the washing machine."

Lorraine reassured them. "I prefer unpacking without him here under my feet."

When Quent came in he was subdued and grumpy, exaggerating his limp from an old motorbike accident. Apparently he was struggling to set up his speakers, and had lost some crucial connecting leads. Calum offered to help him after supper, but Quent said glumly, imposing his mood all around the table, that he was too tired and they might as well leave it till tomorrow. His glooms and resentments were an old story for all of them. Lorraine was used to it; she was used to making her accommodations with the old wolf. But there was something changed in her husband now, head down over his plate of curry, shovelling it in. Defeated old wolf. That was something new. She turned her eyes away uneasily—she didn't want to see that. She wasn't ready for that yet. ♦

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Tessa Hadley on marriage's metamorphoses.

THE CURRENT CINEMA

THE HUNT IS ON

"Mission: Impossible—Dead Reckoning Part One."

BY ANTHONY LANE

Like the beat, beat, beat of the tomtom, a pounding of the drums tells us that another installment of "Mission: Impossible" is under way. Most of us know the trills and thrills of Lalo Schifrin's original score, which remains the most exciting theme tune ever composed for TV. (Paddling furiously in its wake is that of "Hawaii Five-O.") For the ensuing movie franchise, the tune has been repeatedly stretched and tweaked—or, in the case of the second film, lacerated by Limp Bizkit. Now, as the seventh chapter of the saga begins, we hear no melody at all: nothing but the rhythm, thudding forth. But it's enough. We brace ourselves, and adopt the Mission position. Here we go.

The new movie, which is directed by Christopher McQuarrie, runs for two hours and forty-three minutes, and its full title is "Mission: Impossible—Dead Reckoning Part One," which takes about half an hour to say. If Part Two, which is due to be released next June, is of similar dimensions, we'll be landed with a tale that is more than five hours in the

In "Dead Reckoning," Tom Cruise's character attempts to keep an all-powerful A.I. from falling into the wrong hands.

ILLUSTRATION BY CLAIRE MERCHLINSKY

telling. Concision junkies will have to look elsewhere. The first sign of swelling, in this latest adventure, comes with a gathering of U.S. intelligence personnel, which goes on and on. It's eventually halted by a guy who throws smoke bombs around, unleashing clouds of pretty green gas—a mild surprise to those present, who were presumably expecting coffee and a selection of pastries, but by this stage any interruption is welcome.

The topic of the meeting is the Entity, which is discussed at such length, and in tones of such grandiloquent awe, that I understood it even less at the end than I did at the start. In the world of "Mission: Impossible," villainy gets bigger and more abstract by the movie. In "Rogue Nation" (2015), we had the Syndicate. In "Fallout" (2018), we had the Apostles. Now we get the Entity. (What next? The Intimation? The Word in Your Ear?) It seems to be a species of A.I.—"an enemy that is everywhere and nowhere," we hear, with "a mind of its own." Access to it is granted by a cruciform key, in two sections; collect the pair, slot 'em together, and the Entity lies within your grasp. Any government or terrorist outfit possessing it will wield unquenchable power, and the one person who can stop it from slipping into evil hands is, of course, Ethan Hunt (Tom Cruise), Frodo Baggins having taken early retirement.

Ethan assembles his usual gang, consisting of Luther Stickell (Ving Rhames), who has been on call since the first "Mission: Impossible" (1996), and Benji Dunn (Simon Pegg). Also in the mix is Ilsa Faust (Rebecca Ferguson), who made her début in "Rogue Nation." To my eyes, it was with the arrival of Ferguson that the franchise truly took flight; her manner was tranquil even at the height of tension, her character's fealty was elusive, and she was splendidly unimpressed by the hero. That impressed him. Make no mistake, Cruise is in control of these movies—"A Tom Cruise Production," the opening credits of "Dead Reckoning" announce—but he has the wit to realize how dreary that dominance would become if Ethan were not, at regular intervals, unmanned by women.

Hence the amazing Grace (Hayley Atwell). She is a thief, whom Ethan bumps into at the Abu Dhabi airport. The thing about bumping into Grace is that, post-bump, you will find yourself bereft of valuables, for her fingers are feather-light. Although she has a sheaf of passports, like Jason Bourne, she is new to mayhem, never mind to brutality, and Atwell does a lovely job of suggesting that Grace's natural state is one of criminal innocence—wide-eyed yet without a flake of ditziness, and far too schooled in common sense to be a femme fatale. Observe how she pauses, with a frown of uncertainty, before putting on one of those rubber masks which more seasoned habitués of "Mission: Impossible," when switching identities, don and doff like gloves. Ever practical, she ties her hair back before clambering onto the outside of a speeding train, and, as she and Ethan are harried through Roman streets by multiple vehicles, exclaims, "Is there anyone *not* chasing us?" An excellent question. The chase concludes with a merry plea. "Don't hate me," she says, leaving Ethan bewitched, bothered, and be-handcuffed to a steering wheel. Nice.

The cuffs are a Hitchcockian clue, and the whole movie is clamorous with echoes of earlier works. ("Dead Reckoning" was a Humphrey Bogart thriller from 1947—tangled, surly, and steeped in postwar bitterness.) On the trusty comic principle that huge blockbusters deserve dinky modes of transport, Ethan and Grace scoot through Rome in a Fiat 500, the color of ripe lemons, recalling Roger Moore's Citroën 2CV in "For Your Eyes Only" (1981), or, indeed, the tuk-tuk driven to exhaustion by Harrison Ford in the latest "Indiana Jones." The climax of McQuarrie's film, set on and atop a train, alludes with pride to the first "Mission: Impossible" and winds up saluting "The General" (1926), Buster Keaton's runaway masterpiece, as a locomotive takes a deep dive through a broken bridge.

Cruise has none of Keaton's dreamy stoicism, but both actors, trim and compact, define themselves by the outsized magnificence of their stunts. In addition, each of them is most at ease when in haste. They run unstoppably yet with an oddly formal poise—torso held upright, like that of a waiter with a tray, above the pumping pistons of their legs. Watch Keaton sprint along the crest of a hill, a century ago, in the finale of "Seven Chances," or Cruise in full flow on the roof of an airport, in "Dead Reckoning." Relentlessness of this order ought to be chilling. Not so. Instead, we are stirred and amused by a preternatural sight: men as little machines.

There is a devout podcast, "Light the Fuse," which peruses "Mission: Impossible" in all its incarnations. Should you wish to hear an interview—nay, a *two-part* interview—with a former marketing intern on the third film, here is your opportunity. As the podcast approaches its two-hundred-and-fortieth episode, one has to ask: why do these movies continue to suck us in? Perhaps because they are as fetishistic as their fans. Precision is everything. I have lost count of the objects, friendly and hostile, that click, lock, or shunt into place. The bass flute that turned into an assassin's rifle, in "Rogue Nation," somehow stood for the cunningly wrought design of the entire narrative. Likewise, on a larger scale, the main attraction of "Dead Reckoning" is a motorbike-and-parachute leap that was previewed, unpacked, and explained online, many months ago, the purpose being to demonstrate that Cruise, the nerveless and unfading star, had performed the maneuver himself. Here is a motion picture equipped with auto-spoilers, eager to stress that at the heart of its fantasy lies something risky and real.

It was after "Rogue Nation" that I searched my conscience and discovered, as I sorted through the rubble, that I was looking forward with greater gusto to the next helping of "Mission: Impossible" than I was to the upcoming James Bond. For somebody reared on 007, this was tantamount to apostasy. I felt like a mid-Victorian Protestant admitting, in shame and confusion, to the lure of the Catholic faith. The change of allegiance was merely hardened by "No Time to Die," the most recent Bond flick, in 2021, which foundered in an agony of self-involvement. Who wants a hero who expires under the sheer weight of backstory? Where's the fun in that?

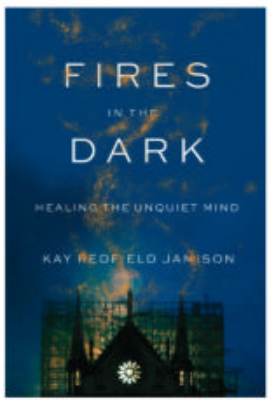
By contrast, retrospection has played a blessedly small part in the emotional legend of Ethan Hunt. *We* gaze back, in remembrance of stunts past—"Oh, my God, that bit in the fourth one where he climbed a skyscraper with magnetic suckers on his mitts," and so on. Ethan's own impulse, though, is forever onward, and to complain that his character lacks

depth is to misinterpret the laws of dramatic physics. He is mass times velocity plus grin. If he has a history, it tends to self-destruct from film to film; which of us honestly remembers, let alone cares, that he got married in "Mission: Impossible III" (2006)? Does he remember? That's why the plot of "Dead Reckoning" is a cause for concern—not because of the metaphysical fluff ("Whoever controls the Entity controls the truth") but because of Gabriel (Esai Morales), a smooth devil who craves the cruciform key. Thirty years ago, apparently, he crossed paths with Ethan, who declares, "In a very real sense, he made me who I am today." I don't like the sound of that. Let us pray that Part Two will not require Ethan to follow the example of poor 007, forsaking crazy capers to lick his psychological wounds.

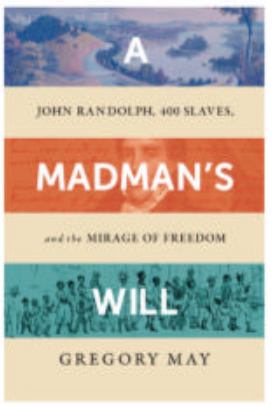
For now, how does Part One stack up? Well, as I say, it's too talky by half. A funky soirée at the Doge's Palace, in Venice, brings together Ethan, Ilsa, Gabriel, Grace, and the White Widow (Vanessa Kirby), the arms dealer with a hypnotizing stare whom we first encountered in "Fallout." All the interested parties, in other words, yet the result is just not interesting; I vaguely hoped that Miss Marple would show up, reveal the killer's name, and hit the dance floor. Soon afterward, a fight breaks out in an alleyway, during which Ethan beats a woman's head against a wall—a spasm of nastiness that has no place in a saga as strangely anesthetized as "Mission: Impossible." There isn't the faintest shudder of sex in "Dead Reckoning," so why does McQuarrie allow such violence to sour the spirited action?

But let's be fair. Despite its longueurs and shortcomings, this movie is still a bag of extravagant treats. A submarine attacked by an invisible foe beneath the Arctic ice. A grand piano suspended directly over Ethan and Grace, and prevented from dropping only by a slowly weakening clamp. Rebecca Ferguson wearing a sniper's eye patch. A nuclear bomb that asks the person trying to defuse it whether he is afraid of death. And, best of all, in Rome, the Fiat 500 rocking and rolling down the Spanish Steps—which, as we are charmingly assured in the closing credits, were not harmed in the making of the film. Thank God. Or thank Tom Cruise. The choice is yours. ♦

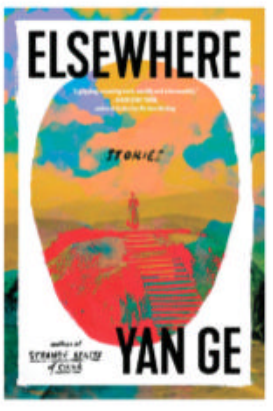
BRIEFLY NOTED



Fires in the Dark, *by Kay Redfield Jamison (Knopf)*. In this loose sequel to a best-selling memoir of bipolar illness, Jamison, a writer and a psychologist, explores the process of prying a mind from disease or despair. Healing, she writes, depends on "harvesting the imagination" and navigating "the balance between remembering and forgetting"; it also, crucially, relies on support. The book comprises portraits of healers, including W. H. R. Rivers, who treated soldiers who suffered from shell shock during the First World War, and Paul Robeson, who found solace in intuition and in the irrational. Ultimately, Jamison emphasizes the importance of recognizing a diversity of sources of fortitude and models of accompaniment.



A Madman's Will, *by Gregory May (Liveright)*. In 1833, the Virginia congressman John Randolph freed his nearly four hundred slaves while on his deathbed. This detailed history untangles the much publicized legal dispute that ensued, wherein Randolph's relatives, some of whom argued that he had gone mad, fought against the slaves' manumission. Randolph left conflicting directives—his last written will bequeathed most of his estate to a relative, but an earlier version emancipated the people he enslaved—and it took thirteen years for a court to uphold his dying wish. May cautions against ascribing honorable motives to Randolph, and stresses that those he freed continued to face prejudice and violence in the North. "Because manumission was just an exercise of the giver's rights," he notes, "it changed almost nothing."



Elsewhere, *by Yan Ge (Scribner)*. This collection of stories, the English-language début of an acclaimed Chinese novelist, spans continents and centuries in its depictions of displacement. A band of poets seeks shelter after the devastating earthquake that struck Sichuan Province in 2008; a Chinese woman who moves to Dublin with her Irish husband recalls their fateful honeymoon in Burma; a construction worker who has never left his home town visits New York City; an eleventh-century scholar attempts to finish his book under a death sentence. With wry humor and occasional earthy surrealism, Yan—who was born in Sichuan and lives in Britain—delicately renders both the linguistic and physical manifestations of longing. As one character reflects, it is both "our nature to forget" and "in our nature to resist forgetting."

Snow Road Station, *by Elizabeth Hay (Knopf Canada)*. At the center of this sensitive novel, set in Ontario in 2008, is Lulu, a middle-aged actress who has returned to the hamlet of her youth for her nephew's wedding. The town is populated with familiars: her brother, her best friend, a new lover, a new grandniece. Despite experiencing a terrifying sexual assault, Lulu savors the town's pace of life and decides to stay there, giving up her career and her apartment in Montreal. Hay makes a case for the simplicity of pleasure: "All you have to do," Lulu thinks, "is put yourself in the way of beauty, put yourself into the incredible swing of it."

BEAR SEASON

Where the wild things are.

BY JILL LEPORE

Bears are coming back to places in the U.S. where they haven't been in generations.

I keep a cannister of bear spray on a shelf by the mudroom door, next to a cakey-capped tube of sunscreen and two mostly empty and partly rusty green aerosol cans of OFF! Deep Woods insect repellent. I've never used the bear spray, and most days I forget to bring it with me when I trudge out into the woods, even though, to encourage the habit, I got a nifty little holster for it, with a carabiner for hooking it to a belt loop. Honestly, I'm more scared of the spray than of the bears. A few years ago, a robot in an Amazon warehouse in New Jersey inadvertently burst a cannister of bear spray, and twenty-four humans had to be hospitalized. (The robot was unharmed.) Technically, according to the label on my cannister, which is decorated with a drawing of a grizzly with a gaping red mouth, baring his teeth, it's not bear spray. It's "BEAR ATTACK DETERRENT," and you can see why the clarification is necessary. Last spring, the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation tweeted:

> Listen,
> bear spray
> DOES NOT
> work like bug spray.
> We would like to not have to say that again.

Bear spray is dangerous, but hardly regulated in the U.S.: you can get it at a gun shop; you can get it at Walmart; in most states you can order it online. If you're camping in the backcountry in certain national parks, you're urged to carry it, and you damn well should, but having it on hand is no guarantee that you'll know what to do if you encounter a bear. Most people are stupid about bears, and I'm one of them. Either they're too scared ("bearanoia" is, I gather, the term for this) or they're not scared enough (beardevils?).

There are eight living species of bears, on four continents: polar, panda, brown, black, sun, moon, sloth, and spectacled. Bear populations are plummeting in most of the world, and all except the black and brown kinds are listed as either endangered or vulnerable to extinction. But in some parts of North America bears are getting to be as common as squirrels in Central Park, if not quite so innumerable as rats in Brooklyn. The population of black bears in North America—roughly nine hundred thousand—is more than double the worldwide populations of the seven other kinds of bears combined. Every year, people hunting in Alaska kill thousands of black and brown bears, more bears than there are in Western Europe. There are about a thousand grizzly bears in Yellowstone National Park—twice as many as in 1975. (A grizzly is a type of brown bear, much bigger than a black bear.) Since the nineteen-seventies, American bears in the Lower Forty-eight have been on the move, expanding their range. Not too long ago, a grizzly turned up in Nathan Keane's back yard, near Loma, Montana, which was, at that point, the farthest east a grizzly had been seen in more than a hundred years. Told that he should have known better than to keep chickens in bear country, Keane said, at first, "Well, we aren't in bear country." But then he reconsidered: "Maybe we're starting to be now." Today, there are probably about five thousand black bears in Arkansas. There are black bears again in Texas. In the early nineteen-seventies, there were estimates of fewer than a hundred black bears in New Jersey; by 2003, there were fifteen hundred. That number is now about three thousand, and they've been spotted in every county in the state. In 2014, a black bear killed a twenty-two-year-old Rutgers University student who was hiking with friends. Bear hunting has returned to parts of New Jersey, too, making it less a garden state than a game preserve.

Bears, in short, are coming back to places they haven't been in generations. What does it mean to rewild Montclair, New Jersey, or Grand Rapids, Michigan, or Atlanta, Georgia? "It's an un-

ALEX MAJOLI / PARC DE LA VILLETTE / MAGNUM

contested fact that there are no bears in downtown D.C.," a prosecutor said in 2021 at a hearing for two men charged with attacking a Capitol Police officer on January 6th, pointing out that they had no good reason to be carrying bear spray in the city. Maybe no one had reported a bear sighting in downtown D.C. back then. But last month a black bear turned up on the corner of Fourteenth Street and Monroe, not far from the Brookland Metro station. He wandered around, crossed the street, climbed a tree, and took a nap. Animal control shot him with a tranquillizer gun, put him on a truck, and released him in Maryland. (This wasn't necessarily a happy outcome for the bear; relocated bears often die.) "Curious Cub Captured," the chyron on the local TV news read, as if he were Rupert, or Corduroy, or a young Baloo.

Some of the oldest art made by humans depicts bears, painted on the walls of caves. In the latest version of cave paintings—online videos—you can watch bears breaking into people's houses. They rifle through kitchen drawers. On the patio, they climb into the hot tub; in the back yard, sows cool off in the swimming pool, and cubs swing on the hammock. In 7-Elevens, they shoplift candy. Bears have been up to these kinds of high jinks for as long as people have been building houses, or maybe since people and bears fought over the same caves. Behavior like that lies behind the bear-in-the-kitchen stuff of storybooks: Paddington with his jar of marmalade, Pooh and his cupboard stocked with pots of honey, the Teddy bears' picnic. But in the past several decades, as Americans have been knocking down more forests and building more subdivisions, and, at the same time, conservationists have been trying to stop the killing of bears, bears have become more likely to turn up on your doorstep. "The victim wasn't off walking in the woods," Charlie Rose announced in a CBS News report from 2014 about a Florida woman horribly mauled by a bear. "She was attacked in her own suburban yard." The victim survived, with thirty staples and ten stitches to her head. Wildlife officials, hunting her ursine assailant, trapped and killed at least four bears. Since 1960, the human population of Florida has risen from five million to twenty-two million, and seven million acres of forest and wetlands have been destroyed to house them. "I just can't imagine that," Rose went on, shaking his head. "In your own back yard?" But it was also the bears' back yard.

It was during another housing boom, in the industrializing England of the eighteen-thirties, that the poet Robert Southey wrote "The Story of the Three Bears," a fable about how it's not the bears who are the burglars—it's us, peeping through their windows and barging through their doors, sitting in their chairs and eating up their porridge. "In the words of Wee Bear, 'someone's been lying in my bed,' and, well, here we are," Gloria Dickie writes in "Eight Bears: Mythic Past and Imperiled Future" (Norton). Bears aren't sleeping in our beds; we're sleeping in theirs. And that ticking you hear, that's the bedside alarm clock, about to *brrrring*.

People have been living with bears since people began. People are smarter, but bears are older: they got here first. Both bears and people belong to a mammalian order called boreoeutheria. The branch of the tree which led to bears, dogs, and seals emerged tens of millions of years ago; primates branched off the tree many millions of years after that. Before Darwin made the case that humans had a common ancestor with apes, humans all over the world—across tens of thousands of years and hundreds of thousands of miles—assumed that our closest relatives were bears. Father Bear. Mama Bear. Grandfather Bear. Grandmother Bear. In many languages, the word for "bear" is a familial term: "cousin" (Abenaki), "grandfather" (Penobscot), "chief's son" (Plains Cree), "uncle" (Yakuts). In stories told everywhere from Siberia and Lapland to the plains of the American West and the forests of Vietnam, people came from bears, or bears came from people, or people and bears intermarried and made furry babies. "What other animal occupies as much space in the human imagination as the bear?" Bernd Brunner asked in his brisk 2007 book, "Bears: A Brief History." Into the Middle Ages, European noblemen claimed to be descended from bears. "In some tales," Brunner reports mysteriously, "humans became bears as a result of unfortunate tree-climbing episodes."

There is an uncanniness to bears, as if they were wild men, or people dressed in bear suits. They can walk standing up. They are very clever. They use their paws like hands. Their footprints look like ours. Like us, they're omnivores. I have read that a skinned bear looks eerily like a human. I have never dared to Google this. (I've seen it in Red Dead Redemption 2, and that was enough for me.) But there was a time in history when a sizable percentage of people wouldn't have needed a picture to know what a skinned bear looked like.

A sense of likeness has never stopped people from hunting bears and eating them. "You used us, and yet you knew, and the knowledge was a kind of comfort, that we were something like you," the animals say in John Berger's haunting 1980 film, "Parting Shots from Animals." To be fair, the reverse is also brutally true: bears occasionally hunt and eat people. Timothy Treadwell, an environmentalist and a filmmaker who lived with brown bears in Alaska for thirteen summers, loved the bears, thought of them as his friends, his kith and his kin. When Werner Herzog made a documentary out of Treadwell's footage, "Grizzly Man" (2005), he saw something entirely different through the lens of Treadwell's camera. "What haunts me is that in all the faces of all the bears that Treadwell ever filmed, I discover no kinship, no understanding, no mercy," Herzog says over footage of a brown bear. "I see only the overwhelming indifference of nature," he goes on, as the camera zooms in on the bear's blinking brown eyes. "To me, there is no such thing as a secret world of the bears, and this blank stare speaks only of a half-bored interest in food." Soon after Treadwell took that footage, a bear, maybe that very bear, ate him and his girlfriend.

Still, bears don't wear our scalps or our hides or string our teeth or keep our hands and our feet as trophies. And only people undertake the dark work of torment and imprisonment. Some species of bears, including the cave bear, were likely hunted to extinction; others live mainly in cages. "Overwhelmingly, I encountered bears behind bars," Dickie writes, of her quest to meet all eight kinds of bears. Of those species, few can be said to be thriving. Bears live in forests, and the forests are disappearing. Southeast Asia, the home of the sun bear, is losing ten million acres of primary forest cover

a year. Spectacled bears, maybe about fifteen thousand in all, live high up in the Andes, in Peru, Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, Colombia, and Argentina. Their habitat is disappearing owing to climate change. Dickie went hiking in Peru and never saw one, though she once "heard a bearlike huff." Ice is forest to polar bears; there are around twenty-six thousand left, and the ice is melting. The World Wildlife Fund adopted the giant panda as its emblem in 1961; more money has been spent on saving the panda than on any other wild animal. Once found all over China, pandas now appear in the wild in only three of China's provinces—Gansu, Shanxi, and Sichuan—but in 2016, with two thousand in the wild, the species' status was downgraded from endangered to vulnerable.

Kings and queens and emperors and sultans throughout history have ordered their soldiers to capture bears and bring them to amphitheatres, to watch them fight. Beginning in the sixteenth century, Kalandars, a nomadic Muslim group from North India and Pakistan, made sloth bears dance; mainly, they'd capture cubs and kill their mothers. "A bear does not *dance*," Dickie writes. "To break a bear's wild spirit, the Kalandars punctured its nose often with a hot metal poker and looped a rope or chain through the oozing wound. Then they removed the young bear's claws and bashed out its teeth, sometimes locking the animal's snout in a muzzle full of nails." There and elsewhere, bear trainers starved the cubs and beat them with sticks. Among the Kalandars, nearly half the cubs died within a year of captivity. Although hunting bears was banned in 1972 under the Indian Wildlife Protection Act, the practice of capturing them continues. During the past few decades, India's bear-rescue facilities have housed some twelve hundred ex-dancing bears. In other parts of the world, bears still perform in circuses, dancing and riding bicycles.

Bile from the gallbladders of bears has been used in Chinese medicine since at least the first century A.D. Bear bile contains ursodeoxycholic acid, which makes it possible for bears to hibernate for half the year without their bodies falling apart. Mostly in China (where bear farming is legal) but also in Vietnam (where it's not), Laos, Myanmar, and South Korea, people keep some twenty thousand moon bears, sun bears, and Himalayan brown bears on factory farms, often in iron cages where they cannot stand up or turn around. Many bear-bile farmers, Dickie says, use a method perfected in North Korea: they "cut into the bruin's abdomen, inserting a stainless-steel needle through the incision to create a permanent canal leading directly into the gallbladder." The bears live like that for years, milked for bile, withering away.

"The itsy-bitsy spider went up the corporate ladder. And he didn't care how many lives he ruined along the way. I know, this isn't the book Simon & Schuster wants. But it's the damn truth."

I was once in a sort of greenroom with Tucker Carlson, the former House Majority Leader Dick Armey, and the *Times* reporter Kate Zernike. Mainly what I remember is my silently taking a vow to organize my life so that I'd never have to be in a room like that again. But I also remember this: Carlson and Armey started talking about hunting, comparing kills, telling tall tales, and then just plain making stuff up. Talking about hunting endangered species. The white rhino. The snow leopard. Trying to own the libs before owning the libs was a thing, they'd look at me and Zernike and venture something like "You can take down a polar-bear cub with a twelve-gauge," or "Panda tastes like chicken." It reminded me of a chair that used to be in the White House, a gift to President Andrew Johnson, presented to him in 1865 by a hunter and trapper from California. It was made out of two grizzly bears and had four clawed grizzly-bear feet and two clawed grizzly-bear armrests and a grizzly-bear pelt on the seat and the back, and if you pulled a cord a great grizzly head came out from underneath, jaws gnashing. What is it in man that makes him wish to sit on such a throne?

Americans drove grizzly bears nearly to extinction in the Lower Forty-eight in the nineteenth century, through hunting and through clearing forests. Bears had disappeared from Texas by 1890, from New Mexico by 1931, from Colorado by 1953. As with wolves and bison, Progressive Era efforts to save the bears were pushed by conservationists, like Theodore Roosevelt, who were also hunters. What is the American definition of wilderness? A place where there are bears. Roosevelt and other conservationists wanted to save the wilderness, and the bears, and during the great craze for scientific management it was decided that the government ought to manage these things: forests, bears, parks. Roosevelt

also started the Teddy-bear craze, in 1902, after he refused to shoot a big-eared bear that had been tied to a tree by his guide. (The bear wasn't spared; already badly injured, it was knifed to death.)

Today, there are more Teddy bears than there are real bears. In "Much Loved," Mark Nixon's collection of photographs of adored stuffed bears, each bear comes with a story. "I received Bookie from my mama and papa when I was three months old," twenty-four-year-old Lauren de Rosa writes, about a bedraggled and much repaired white bear in a pink dress. "We were inseparable until I left for college." I gave my first baby a stuffed bear named Ellie, for Eleanor Roosevelt, and he would not leave the house without her. We had to get a double, so that, in case we lost her, there would always be an Ellie at home. Once, when he was not yet two, we turned a corner inside a big, fancy toy store in New York and discovered a giant version of Ellie, maybe eight feet tall, slumped against a wall, her furry arms open wide. He shrieked, climbed in her lap, and burrowed his face in her chest, pressing his own little Ellie to her, too, another nursling cub.

During decades when most people's experience with bears came from Teddy bears and children's books, real bears lived on in national parks, where visitors got into the habit of feeding them, as if they were pets. At least as early as the eighteen-eighties, campers and staffers deliberately left trash out at Yellowstone—the world's first national park—in order to watch bears, as Alice Wondrak Biel reported in her 2006 book, "Do (Not) Feed the Bears." In the eighteen-nineties, one of the park's first acting superintendents kept bears chained to the side of his house. Roadside feeding started with the first automobiles, in the nineteen-tens, and a Yellowstone superintendent developed "bear feeding grounds." At a feeding area built in Otter Creek in 1931, fifteen hundred people squeezed into an amphitheatre to watch the bears come out of the woods and eat trash.

Outside of zoos and national parks, the bear population kept falling. Thirty-one of thirty-seven grizzly populations in the Lower Forty-eight disappeared between 1922 and 1972. The fewer bears there were in the wild, the less experience people had with bears. Bears are wary of people, but the more they associate people with food the closer they'll come, and the closer they come the more likely they are to end up attacking, especially if a person gets between a sow and her cubs, or between any bear and a source of food. In the nineteen-fifties, Yellowstone began printing brochures telling the public that bears can be dangerous, but in 1958 the goofy Hanna-Barbera cartoon character Yogi Bear débuted on television, in a green hat and necktie, begging for food from picnicking campers at Jellystone Park. In 1961, Yogi got his own show, and around the same time Yellowstone adopted a bear-management program. "You've got that bear's ailment, picnic-itis," a doctor tells Yogi in one episode from that year. "You'll have to stay on a strict diet. You'll have to eat bear-type food: nuts, berries, absolutely nothing from a picnic basket!" But, after Yogi keeps begging, the ranger relents and gives Yogi a picnic basket, "loaded with goodies." Jellystone's superintendent scolds the ranger: "Don't you know the first rule of the park is 'Don't feed the bears'?" When Yellowstone finally began seriously implementing its bear-management program, closing the park's dumps, teaching visitors not to feed the bears, and ticketing violators, bear-related injuries fell, from sixty-one in 1967 to three in 1975.

Yellowstone's bear management is a success story in handling "human-bear conflicts." Curiously, the language of wildlife management is an artifact of the Cold War. "Conflict studies" and the field of "conflict resolution" both date back to the nineteen-fifties and policymakers' thinking about nuclear deterrence (negotiating, that is, with the proverbial Russian bear). By the nineteen-eighties, environmentalists, too, were talking about conflict resolution. The first international gathering about human-bear conflicts, or H.B.C., was held in Canada in 1987. What, exactly, H.B.C. means is very different in different parts of the world. In North America and Europe, people see bears chiefly as an annoyance, if they think about them at all; in Asia and South America, conflict with bears can affect people's livelihoods.

In the U.S., bear management mainly involves managing people, by way of providing public education and bear-proof trash bins. New York State has a program to teach people to be "Bear-Wise." Gloria Dickie got interested in bears in part from hanging out in Boulder, Colorado, with a group of trained volunteers called Bearsitters. Since 2002, they've tried to make sure any bears that wander inside the city limits get out again, without hurting anyone or getting hurt; the main tactic is to drive them out by hazing them—clanging pots or making other loud, irritating noises. "The hope is that the bear will return to the mountains and remember how horrible we humans are, never wanting to return to town," the Bearsitters' Web site, bearsandpeople.com, explains.

How worried should you be about bears? "Every year more people are injured by toilets than they are injured by bears," the National Park Service has claimed. Basically, it depends on the bear, and the situation. The mnemonic goes: If it's brown, lie down; if it's black, fight back; if it's white, say good night (as in, you'll never survive a polar-bear attack). But that's not real advice. Generally, don't run. And bring bear spray, which, studies prove, is better protection to have during a bear attack than a gun. Otherwise, the only rule is: don't take out your phone to look up the rules.

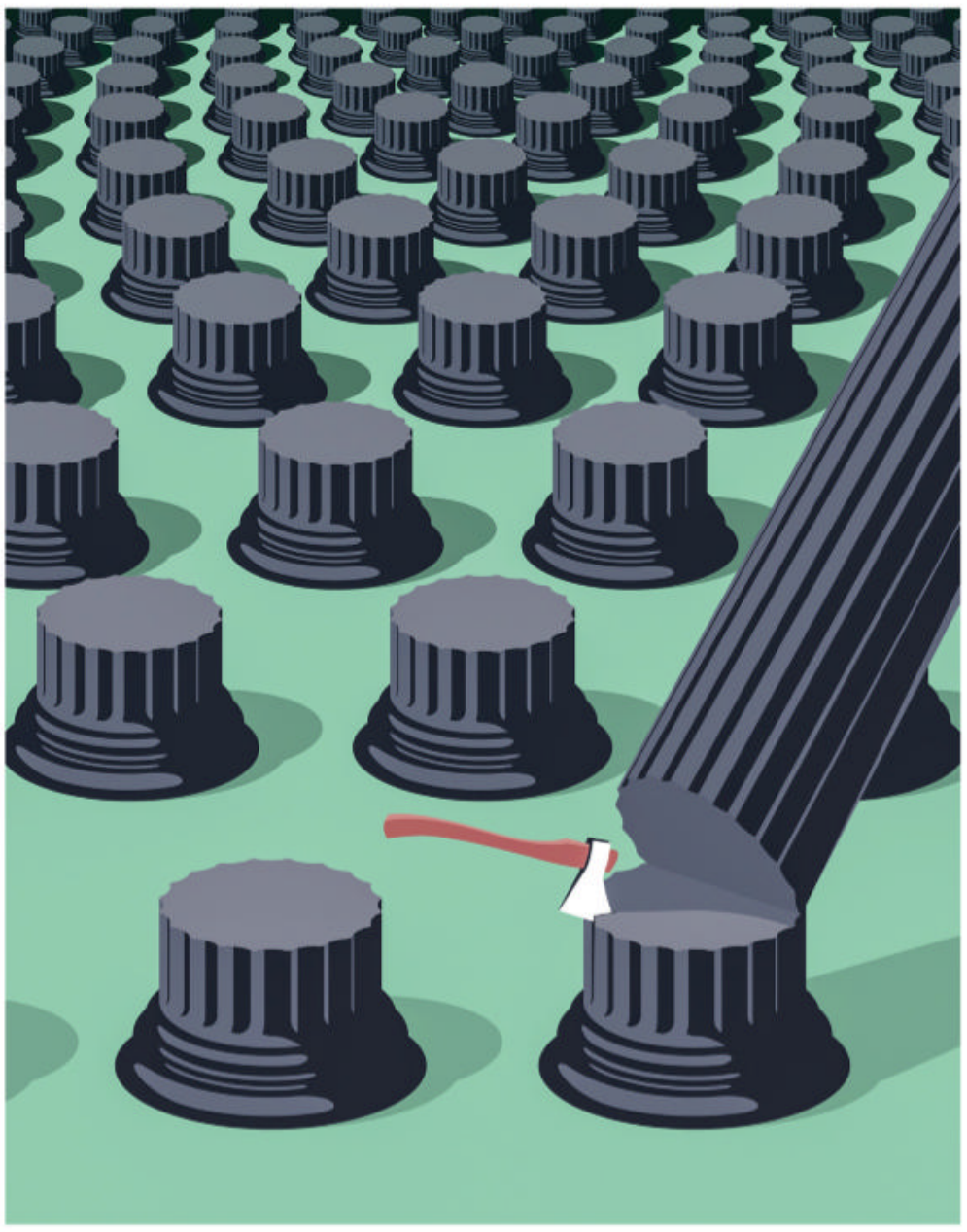
It's not all "Cocaine Bear" out there. Bears are not very interested in you. Still, as one ecologist told Dickie, "if we can't live with black bears, how the heck are we going to learn to live with grizzlies? It's one thing to have a black bear in your house, but it's a whole different ball game to have a grizzly in your house." And, outside of conflict-managed national parks, the record of people living next door to bears doesn't augur well. Last year, a black bear mauled a woman in Vermont, just outside her front door, after her Shih Tzu chased its cub up a tree. She lived right by Green Mountain National Forest. "It's easy for me to be mad at the bear," her boyfriend told NBC News, after saving the woman by whacking the bear in the head with a heavy flashlight. "But we're asking for it." ♦

A CRITIC AT LARGE

THE PRICE *IS* RIGHT

The rise and fall of neoliberalism.

BY LOUIS MENAND



Free-market ideology didn't prevail in the free market; it was heavily subsidized.

"Neoliberalism" has been called a political swear word, and it gets blamed for pretty much every socioeconomic ill we have, from bank failures and income inequality to the gig economy and demagogic populism. Yet for forty years neoliberalism was the principal economic doctrine of the American government. Is that what has landed us in the mess we're in?

What's "neo" about neoliberalism is really what's retro about it. It's confusing, because in the nineteen-thirties the term "liberal" was appropriated by politicians such as Franklin D. Roosevelt and came to stand for policy packages like the New Deal and, later on, the Great Society. Liberals were people who believed in using government to regulate business and to provide public goods—education, housing, dams and highways, retirement pensions, medical care, welfare, and so on. And they thought collective bargaining would insure that workers could afford the goods the economy was producing.

Those mid-century liberals were not opposed to capitalism and private enterprise. On the contrary, they thought that government programs and strong labor unions made capitalist economies more productive and more equitable. They wanted to save capitalism from its own failures and excesses. Today, we call these people progressives. (Those on the right call them Communists.)

Neoliberalism, in the American context, can be understood as a reaction against mid-century liberalism. Neoliberals think that the state should play a smaller role in managing the economy and meeting public needs, and they oppose obstacles to the free exchange of goods and labor. Their liberalism is, sometimes self-consciously, a throwback to the "classical liberalism" that they associate with Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill: laissez-faire capitalism and individual liberties. Hence, retro-liberalism.

The label "neoliberal" has been attached to a range of political species, from libertarians, who tend to be programmatically anti-government, to New Democrats like Bill Clinton, who embrace the policy goals of the New Deal and the Great Society but think that there are better means of achieving them. But most types of neoliberalism reduce to the term "markets." Get the planners and the policymakers out of the way and let the markets find solutions.

The scholarly literature on neoliberalism tends to focus either on the intellectual genealogy of neoliberal thought (which starts, more or less, in Europe in the nineteen-thirties) or on the political history of neoliberal policies (which start in the nineteen-seventies). Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway's "The Big Myth: How American Business Taught Us to Loathe Government and Love the Free Market" (Bloomsbury) adds a third dimension to the story. In their account, neoliberalism—they prefer the term "market fundamentalism," which they credit to George Soros—represents the triumph of decades of pro-business lobbying. They also tell the intellectual story and the political story of neoliberalism, so their book is, in effect, three histories piled on top of one another. This makes for a very thick volume.

The lobbying story is good to know. Most voters are highly sensitive to the suggestion that someone might take away their personal freedom, and this is what pro-business propaganda has been warning them about for the past hundred years. The propaganda took many forms, from college textbooks funded by business groups to popular entertainments like Laura Ingalls Wil-

ILLUSTRATION BY BEN WISEMAN

der's "Little House on the Prairie" books, which preach the lesson of self-sufficiency. (The books were promoted as autobiographical, but Oreskes and Conway say that Wilder, with the help of her daughter, completely misrepresented the facts of her family story.)

The endlessly iterated message of this lobbying, Oreskes and Conway say, is that economic and political freedoms are indivisible. Any restriction on the first is a threat to the second. This is the "big myth" of their title, and they show us, in somewhat fire-hose detail, how a lot of people spent a lot of time and money putting that idea into the mind of the American public. The book is an immense scholarly feat, but the authors insist that it is not just an "academic intervention." They have a political purpose. They think that one role of government has been to correct for market failures, and, if government is discredited, how is it going to correct for what may be the biggest market failure of all: climate change?

Oreskes and Conway suggest that we can get an idea of what we're up against from the pandemic. Millions of Americans seemed either to disbelieve what government officials were telling them about COVID or to regard public-health measures like vaccines and mask mandates as encroachments on their liberty. (There was also some anti-vaxxer hysteria.) Fantastically well-compensated professional athletes, on whose liberties very little encroaches, were among the worst role models.

Comparing the American response to that of other countries, Oreskes and Conway suggest that forty per cent of this country's COVID deaths could have been prevented if Americans trusted science, government, and one another. They think that years of science-bashing (the subject of their previous book, "Merchants of Doubt") and anti-government messaging have taught Americans not to. Now when public officials propose policies for addressing climate change, people will be told, "They want to take your televisions away," and many will believe it.

The notion of hitching economic freedom to political freedom, or corporate freedom to personal freedom, was not dreamed up by lobbyists. It is the core tenet of the scriptural texts of market fundamentalism, Friedrich A. Hayek's "The Road to Serfdom" and Milton Friedman's "Capitalism and Freedom." Hayek and Friedman were academic economists; they both were awarded the Nobel Prize, in 1974 and 1976, respectively. But their famous books are not academic. They're polemical, high on assertion and low on evidence. Still, the two books have remained in print. They pushed some buttons.

Hayek wrote "The Road to Serfdom" during the Second World War. He was living in England, after emigrating from Austria to take a position at the London School of Economics, and his book came out there in 1944. If you were looking back at recent world history in 1944, what would you see? A stock-market crash, a worldwide depression, and the rise of two powerful totalitarian states that, if Hitler had not made the mistake of invading the Soviet Union, might have divided Europe between them for generations. You might reasonably have concluded that, even if Germany was finally defeated and the Soviet Union was put back in its box, free-market capitalism and liberal democracy had had their day.

Hayek felt this was what people in England were concluding—that a state-managed economy, of some sort, was necessary to prevent another meltdown. They might not think that this would mean giving up their liberty, but Hayek warned them that that was a fatal mistake. He dedicated the book to "The Socialists of All Parties." He believed that central planning, even when carried out by an elected government, was a kind of dictatorship. People shouldn't be told what to do with their property, he said, and "what our generation has forgotten is that the system of private property is the most important guaranty of freedom, not only for those who own property, but scarcely less for those who do not."

Hayek acknowledged that there are things governments can do that private actors cannot. Presumably, you need laws and courts to protect property rights and to enforce contracts; you need an army, and some form of money. There are also public needs that private enterprise cannot profitably or efficiently address. Oreskes and Conway tell us that Hayek "was not as hostile to social welfare programs as he is often reputed to be."

But Hayek was making a classic slippery-slope argument. Planning is top-down and requires centralized authority, and, whatever that authority's motives, this inevitably devolves into totalitarianism. "From the saintly and single-minded idealist to the fanatic is often but a step," as he put it. He believed that socialism destroys what he saw as a basic principle of Western civilization: individualism. The welfare state might keep people housed and fed, but the cost is existential. It's not just that people will lose their freedom—it's that they will not even care.

"The Road to Serfdom" was written in a time of geopolitical uncertainty. The possibility of a totalitarian future, the "Could it happen here?" question, obsessed many intellectuals—including Karl Popper, Hannah Arendt, Isaiah Berlin, and George Orwell, who reviewed Hayek's book. Hayek is "probably right in saying that in this country the intellectuals are more totalitarian-minded than the common people," Orwell wrote. "But he does not see, or will not admit, that a return to 'free' competition means for the great mass of people a tyranny probably worse, because more irresponsible, than the State." The New York *Times* called "The Road to Serfdom" "one of the most important books of our generation." It spoke to its moment.

Friedman's book, on the other hand, would seem to have been almost comically mistimed. He published it in 1962, in the middle of what the economist Robert Lekachman, in a widely read book published in 1966, called "the Age of Keynes." Government programs were understood to be essential to stimulating growth and maintaining "aggregate demand." If people stop consuming, companies stop producing, workers get laid off, and so on. That was taken to be the lesson of the Great Depression and the New Deal: more government intervention, not less.

In the U.K., the postwar Labour government, as Hayek had feared, nationalized key industries and created the National Health Service—"socialized medicine," as opponents called it. In the United States, government programs

like Social Security and the G.I. Bill were enormously popular, and huge spending acts were passed. The National and Interstate Defense Highways Act of 1956 authorized the construction of the interstate highway system, easing interstate commerce and lowering transportation costs. The National Defense Education Act of 1958 pumped federal money into education. In 1964, Congress would outlaw racial and gender discrimination in employment. A year later, it would create Medicare and Medicaid. Government spending more than doubled between 1950 and 1962. Meanwhile, the top marginal tax rate in the United States and the United Kingdom was close to ninety per cent.

It was a neoliberal's nightmare—and yet between 1950 and 1973 the world G.D.P. grew at the fastest rate in history. The United States and Western Europe experienced remarkably high rates of growth and low levels of wealth inequality—in fact, the lowest anywhere at any time. In 1959, the poverty rate in the United States was twenty-two per cent; in 1973, it was eleven per cent. It was also a period of "liberation." People felt free, acted out their freedom, and wanted more of it. They weren't supposed to feel that way. They were supposed to be passive and dependent. It would not have seemed a propitious time to write a full-out assault on government.

And yet Friedman wrote one, and he did not pull punches. "Capitalism and Freedom" begins with a contemptuous response to John F. Kennedy's Inaugural Address. "The paternalistic 'what your country can do for you,'" Friedman wrote, "implies that government is the patron, the citizen the ward, a view that is at odds with the free man's belief in his own responsibility for his own destiny." (Of course, Kennedy had said that Americans should *not* ask what their country could do for them. But never mind. It's that kind of book.)

Friedman provided a list of things he was opposed to: rent control, minimum-wage laws, bank regulation, the Federal Communications Commission, the Social Security program, occupational licensure requirements, "so-called" public housing, the military draft, publicly operated toll roads, and national parks. Later on in the book, he came out against anti-discrimination laws (which he compared to the Nazis' Nuremberg laws: if the government can tell you whom you must not discriminate against, it can tell you whom you must discriminate against), labor unions (anti-competitive monopolies), public schools (where taxpayers are compelled to fund courses on "basket weaving"), and the graduated income tax. He argued that an inheritance tax is no more just than a talent tax would be. Inheritance and talent are both accidents of birth. Why is it fair to tax the first and not the second?

Much in Friedman's book echoes Hayek. (From 1950 to 1972, they both taught at the University of Chicago, Friedman in the economics department and Hayek in the Committee on Social Thought.) "A society which is socialist cannot be democratic, in the sense of guaranteeing individual freedom," Friedman says. And: "Economic freedom is . . . an indispensable means toward the achievement of political freedom."

Like Hayek, Friedman conjured up the loss of individualism. Yes, he conceded, government programs and regulations might improve the quality of life and raise the level of performance of social services locally, but, in the process, they would "replace progress by stagnation" and "substitute uniform mediocrity for the variety essential for that experimentation which can bring tomorrow's laggards above today's mean."

Essentially, "Capitalism and Freedom" is an argument for privatization. The free market is a price system: it aligns supply and demand and assigns goods and services their appropriate price. If the state wants to get into the business of, say, retirement benefits, it should have to compete on a level playing field with rival providers. There should be a market in retirement plans. People should be free to choose one, and equally free to choose none.

Friedman had some ingenious ideas about ways to use the market approach—for example, allowing investors to pay university tuition in exchange for a percentage of a student's future earnings. He thought that school segregation could be fixed by a voucher system that permitted parents to choose which school to send their children to.

"How did this radical and incredible—which is to say not credible—book sell so well?" Oreskes and Conway ask. And it did: half a million copies, with translations into eighteen languages. One reason was Friedman's promotional energy. He made himself into one of the most prominent public intellectuals of the day. He wrote a column for *Newsweek*, and between 1966 and 1984 he published more than four hundred op-eds. In 1980, with his wife, Rose, he produced a ten-part television program called "Free to Choose," broadcast on PBS.

One episode has him explaining how a pencil comes into being. The materials—wood, graphite, rubber, metal—are produced independently in countries all over the world. How do they come together to make a pencil? "There was no commissar sending out orders from some central office," Friedman says, waving a pencil. "It was the magic of the price system." His viewers may not have been sure exactly what "the price system" was, but it was a cool show-and-tell. And they knew what a commissar was. Nobody likes a commissar.

Another reason Friedman's book survived the age of Keynes is that the Chicago economics department became well established in the academic world. A number of its faculty during Friedman's time there would also win Nobel Prizes, including George Stigler and Gary Becker, whose views were closely allied with Friedman's. There emerged something called the Chicago School, identified as the intellectual force behind a microeconomic approach to social science, which explains much behavior in terms of "price" (one of Becker's books is called "The Economic Approach to Human Behavior"), and the law and economics movement in jurisprudence. This work was not propaganda, but, as Oreskes and Conway say, it gave pro-business propaganda intellectual credibility.

The Chicago School had its Founding Father: Adam Smith. Friedman had an Adam Smith necktie; Stigler wore an Adam Smith T-shirt. As Glory M. Liu explains in her history of Smith's reception in the United States, "Adam Smith's America" (Princeton), the Chicagoans "reimagined Smith as the original author of the price mechanism." This involved carving away the

parts of Smith's thought that didn't fit the thesis. " 'Self-interest' and the 'invisible hand,'" Liu says, came to signify "an entire way of thinking about society as being organized through the natural, automatic, and self-generating actions of individual economic actors."

Oreskes and Conway agree. They point out that when Stigler produced an abridged "Wealth of Nations," in the nineteen-fifties, he omitted most of the passages in which Smith advocates the regulation of industries where the unchecked pursuit of self-interest can cause social harm. Banking was one of them. What Oreskes and Conway call the "Americanization" of Adam Smith reduced him to the trope of the invisible hand.

In fact, the phrase "invisible hand" appears only once in the thousand pages of "The Wealth of Nations." Smith uses the metaphor to characterize the means by which an act of self-interested profit-seeking can serve a social good. (That idea had already been put forward in Bernard Mandeville's "The Fable of the Bees," published in 1714.) Smith's book, published in 1776, meant to oppose a prevalent economic strategy in eighteenth-century Britain—the nationalist and protectionist system of mercantilism—by explaining how free trade and the division of labor create more national wealth. He was writing before the Industrial Revolution had really begun or the modern concept of capitalism had taken hold. It is an anachronism to read him as though he were countering Keynes.

Stigler called "The Wealth of Nations" a "stupendous palace erected upon the granite of self-interest." But Smith did not think that markets are always self-regulating, and he did not think that people are always self-interested. The very first sentence of his other major work, "The Theory of Moral Sentiments," reads, "How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it, except the pleasure of seeing it." (Becker might have called this a "shadow price." There are certain things that make people feel better or worse about themselves, and those feelings get priced into the good or service they are buying. For a free-market economist, the price is always right.)

"Based on the bite marks, I'd say this one is yours."

The real reason market fundamentalism prevailed was not that it won the war of ideas. It was that the postwar boom came to an end. The economy started to go south in the early seventies, with the oil embargo and the recession of 1973-74, during which the Dow lost forty-five per cent of its value. It became prohibitively expensive to borrow money. By 1980, the prime rate, the interest rate that banks charge their most creditworthy customers, had gone past twenty per cent (it was 2.25 per cent in 1950), and inflation was around fourteen per cent. The unemployment rate rose from 3.5 per cent in 1969 to 10.8 per cent in 1982. The American economy was stuck in "stagflation": high inflation and low growth.

Nixon, Ford, Carter—it seemed that no Administration knew how to stop the bleeding. Government spending and high marginal tax rates, which had seemed to work fine in the nineteen-sixties, now looked like impediments to recovery. The Chicago School approach gained traction. Still, as the historian Daniel T. Rodgers points out in "Age of Fracture," his intellectual history of the period, "the puzzle of the age is not that economic concepts moved into the center of social debate; the riddle is that so abstract and idealized an idea of efficient market action should have arisen amid so much real-world market imperfection."

It helped that, in 1980, a true believer was elected President. Ronald Reagan had been converted to free-market theology during the years he spent as a spokesman for General Electric, from 1954 to 1962, not only hosting "General Electric Theatre," broadcast every Sunday in prime time on CBS, but preaching the free-enterprise gospel and the magic of markets to workers in G.E. plants around the country. "Government is not the solution to our problem," he said in his Inaugural Address. "Government *is* the problem." Those were sentences that the authors of "The Road to Serfdom" and "Capitalism and Freedom"

had lived to hear. The United Kingdom, under Margaret Thatcher, undertook a parallel revision of welfare-state economics (rougher there, since there was more for Thatcher to undo).

One of the first things Reagan did as President was to break the air-traffic controllers' union, whose members, federal employees, had gone on strike. He fired the strikers, and the union was decertified. Still, although Reagan's pro-market spirit was willing, his political flesh was weak. He passed the largest peacetime tax increase in American history, failed to eliminate any major government agency, and added nearly two trillion dollars to the national debt. But he implanted in the mind of the electorate the idea that business freedom is personal freedom. In 1988, he awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Milton Friedman.

As Oreskes and Conway point out, deregulation really began under Jimmy Carter, Reagan's predecessor. Carter, sometimes with the support of the arch-liberal Edward M. Kennedy, deregulated the airline industry, railroads, and trucking. Deregulation continued after Clinton was elected, in 1992. "The era of big government is over," he famously announced. "Self-reliance and teamwork are not opposing virtues—we must have both." In the United Kingdom, Tony Blair's government took the same approach. Together, Blair and Clinton promoted a neoliberal approach to international trade, the beginnings of what we now call globalization.

In 1993, Congress ratified the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). In 1996, it passed the Telecommunications Act, opening up the communications business. And in 1999 it repealed part of the Glass-Steagall Act, a Depression-era statute that prohibited commercial banks from joining together with securities firms ("investment banks").

These policies were undertaken in the belief that freeing markets increases productivity and competition, lowering prices, and that markets regulate themselves more efficiently than administrators can. But some of their unintended effects can still be felt today. NAFTA had a net-positive impact on the economies of the signatories—Canada, Mexico, and the United States—but it also made it easier for American manufacturers to relocate plants to Mexico, where labor is cheaper, inflicting severe social and economic damage on certain areas of the U.S. It is probable that many Trump voters were people, or the children of people, whose lives and communities were disrupted by NAFTA.

The Telecommunications Act included a clause, Section 230, immunizing Web operators from liability for third-party content posted on their sites. The consequences are well known. And the weakening of Glass-Steagall, along with the Federal Reserve chairman Alan Greenspan's relaxation of bank oversight, has been blamed for the financial crisis of 2008 and the Great Recession that followed, a crisis that Oreskes and Conway estimate cost the public twenty-three trillion dollars.

Yet the neoliberal era was hardly a triumph for Friedman's approach. Pro-market policies were generally mixed with state funding and government direction. Clinton may have subscribed to many neoliberal principles, but one of the first initiatives his Administration attempted was a reform of the health-care system where the government was to give every citizen a "health-care security card"—which sounds a lot like socialized medicine.

Both NAFTA and the Telecommunications Act contain plenty of regulatory requirements. The government is overseeing how business is done, not simply stepping aside. As with the freedom of speech and the freedom of religion, it's the state that creates the social space in

which economic freedom can be exercised. Without government, we are in a state of nature, where coercion, not freedom, is the norm.

There is a strange blind spot in "The Big Myth." The authors are exhaustive in debunking the fundamentalist view of the "magic of the marketplace" (although fundamentalisms aren't hard to debunk, and a lot of their criticisms are familiar). But what especially exercises them is the equation pro-business propagandists made between free markets and political liberties—"the claim that America was founded on three basic, interdependent principles: representative democracy, political freedom, and free enterprise." Oreskes and Conway call this "a fabricated claim." Is it?

As they point out, there's no mention of free enterprise in the Constitution. But there are mentions of property, and almost every challenge to government interference in the economy rests on the concept of a right to property. The Framers were highly sensitive to this issue. They not only made the concept of private property compatible with the concept of political rights; they made property itself a political right. And vice versa: rights were personal property. "As a man is said to have a right to his property," James Madison wrote, "he may be equally said to have a property in his rights."

Thus the Fifth Amendment provides that "no person shall be . . . deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law." Like the rest of the Bill of Rights, this was originally understood to apply only to the federal government, but the Fourteenth Amendment, ratified in 1868, applied it to the states as well, and courts have invoked that amendment's "due process" clause to protect all sorts of fundamental rights that are unspecified in the Bill of Rights—such as the right to privacy, which is the constitutional basis for the decision in Roe v. Wade. This is the judicial doctrine known as "substantive due process."

Pro-business lobbyists were therefore completely correct to define free enterprise, by which they meant the freedom to do as they liked with their property, as a political liberty. In the early decades of the twentieth century, the Supreme Court used substantive due process to strike down government acts and programs that impinged on the right to property and on what the Court called "the liberty of contract"—including minimum-wage laws, worker-safety regulations, and a number of New Deal programs. The treatment of private ownership as a political right was not something dreamed up by Friedrich Hayek

or the National Association of Manufacturers. It is, for better or worse, part of the fabric of American society.

But this political liberty is not absolute. The Framers were adept at balancing one grant of authority with a countervailing one. When the Supreme Court—under pressure from Franklin Roosevelt, who threatened to pack the Court—did an about-face on the New Deal, in 1937, it had another legal mechanism at its disposal. Article I of the Constitution gives Congress the power "to regulate Commerce with foreign Nations, and among the several States, and with the Indian Tribes." This is the "commerce clause," which has, since the time of John Marshall, been broadly interpreted to give Congress the power to regulate virtually everything related to interstate commerce. Through the commerce clause, courts began giving Congress new powers, opening the way to the programs and policies of mid-century liberalism. The constitutional authority for the anti-discrimination provisions of the 1964 Civil Rights Act is the commerce clause. You can't tell the story of business's war on government without taking this legal context into account. Due process and the commerce clause were the weapons the antagonists fought with, and, as it generally does, the Supreme Court had the last word.

What hath neoliberalism wrought? On the plus side of the ledger: in 1980, about forty-three per cent of the world lived in extreme poverty (by the World Bank's definition), and today the number is about eight per cent. Globalization has lifted a billion humans out of poverty in just forty years. And you own many household items, like batteries and T-shirts, that were manufactured in Communist countries—China and Vietnam—and that were very inexpensive. New parts of the world, notably East and South Asia, are now economic players. Technological knowledge is no longer a monopoly of the First World powers.

Among the debits: deregulation, which was supposed to spur competition, has not slowed the trend toward monopoly. Despite the Telecommunications Act, just three companies—Verizon, T-Mobile, and A.T.&T.—provide ninety-nine per cent of wireless service. Six companies dominate the media in the United States: Comcast, Disney, Warner Bros. Discovery, Paramount Global, the Fox Corporation, and Sony. Book publishing in the United States is dominated by the so-called Big Five: Hachette, HarperCollins, Macmillan, Penguin Random House, and Simon & Schuster. The music industry is dominated by just three corporate players: the Universal, Sony, and Warner music divisions.

The big fish, with their piles of capital, keep swallowing up the little fish. The Big Five would now be the Big Four if Penguin Random House's deal to acquire Simon & Schuster had not been ruled a violation of antitrust law last fall. Of the twelve most valuable companies in the world, eight of which are tech businesses, all are monopolies or near-monopolies.

And, as Martin Wolf emphasizes in his highly informed and intelligent critique of the global economy, "The Crisis of Democratic Capitalism" (Penguin Press), inequality is everywhere. At the level of the firm: in 1980, C.E.O.s were paid about forty-two times as much as the average employee; in 2016, they were paid three hundred and forty-seven times as much. At the level of the whole society: the three million people who make up the wealthiest one per cent of Americans are collectively worth more than the two hundred and ninety-one million who make up the bottom ninety per cent.

It is the rise in inequality abetted by the neoliberal system that poses the most immediate threat to civil society. Wolf doubts whether the United States will still be a functioning democracy at the end of the decade. Either way, the sun has set on neoliberalism. Both parties have drifted closer to something like mercantilism; the language of the market has lost its magic. "Bidenomics" entails immense government spending; meanwhile, a new cadre—protectionists, crony capitalists, ethnonationalists, and social and cultural provincials—has been rewriting party platforms. Republicans eagerly lambaste Big Tech and clash with "woke" corporations, more intent on fighting a culture war than on championing commerce. People used to pray for the end of neoliberalism. Unfortunately, this is what it looks like. ♦

THE THEATRE

THIS MORTAL COIL

Ato Blankson-Wood stars in "Hamlet" in the Park.

BY VINSON CUNNINGHAM

In Kenny Leon's show, the theatre's most famous mourner is bereft but flirtatious.

Wear black and talk softly, withdraw from the crowd and train your mind on higher things—it's strange how much of the etiquette of grief is also a shortcut to cultivating an aura of sexy mystery. Maybe that's the logic behind casting Ato Blankson-Wood, an increasingly and justly busy actor around New York, in the title role of the new Shakespeare in the Park production of "Hamlet," at the Delacorte. Blankson-Wood has a world-class sulk—onstage, he pouts and rolls his eyes and projects intense dissatisfaction before he ever delivers a line. A few years ago, in Jeremy O. Harris's "Slave Play," he played Gary, a gay Black man whose partner couldn't—or, more precisely, wouldn't—acknowledge the repercussions of their racial differences. Gary was a magnetic malcontent, for whom pain and sex appeal went hand in hand and seemed to spring from the same source.

There's something similar happening with Blankson-Wood's depiction of the theatre's most famous mourner. His Hamlet is bereft but flirtatious, abusive in speech but stylish in dress, lividly angry but under his own perfect control, mixed in emotion and motive and utterly impossible to read. This is less a take on Hamlet—an assertion that he's mad, or juvenile, or the only truly sane character in the kingdom—than a further blurring of the many colors that the play provides. There's "mirth in funeral" and "dirge in marriage," and, in Blankson-Wood's interpretation, a hint of eros that plays against the chaos that comes after death. That eroticism is often aimed in odd, Oedipal directions: in this rendering of the text, Hamlet seems to have absolutely no past or present interest in Ophelia (Solea Pfeiffer), to whom he's been sending declarations of love, but speaks with a strikingly emphasized suggestiveness to his mother, Gertrude (Lorraine Toussaint), and to his uncle, Claudius (John Douglas Thompson), the new king and Gertrude's new husband.

New York audiences were recently treated to the German director Thomas Ostermeier's "Hamlet," starring Lars Eidinger, who eats cemetery dirt and gets wet in the rain and plays wall-breaking games with the audience. Blankson-Wood's Hamlet would *never*. He's undone but strangely put together—his mourning clothes look designer. We're being tricked, but I'm not sure exactly how, or in which direction. With a few exceptions, Hamlet's "hectic" blood is strangely cool.

Blankson-Wood's multifaceted, ultimately unsettled approach may be an outflow of the tendencies of his director, Kenny Leon, who never misses an opportunity to let that hundredth flower bloom. The production is set, we're told in the program notes, in Atlanta, in 2021. Hamlet's father was—as we gather from a huge painted portrait that looms upstage—a member of the United States Marine Corps. In a kind of prologue to the action of the play, at the father's funeral, people come up, one by one or in solemn pairs, to the casket where his body lies, apparently still intimidated by him in death. Off to the side of the stage, in what looks like a ruined lawn (Beowulf Boritt designed the set), is a capsized "Stacy Abrams 2020" banner—a holdover from Leon's Shakespeare in the Park production of "Much Ado About Nothing," in 2019. A praise team sings in tight harmony to send the great man off. The production seems to want to say something about a decadent America skipping past opportunities for hope on its way down a

ILLUSTRATION BY DENNIS ERIKSSON

nihilistic drain, but that line of meaning is never fully pursued.

Instead of a unitary idea, Leon—whose specialty is spectacle—offers a wide-ranging, endlessly inclusive *Gesamtkunstwerk*, in which song and dance can appear to be just as important as Shakespeare's text. The setting looks like a spoiled upper-middle-class utopia, a horrified Alpharetta, Georgia, of the mind, where, in better days, a family like Hamlet's would sit in an air-conditioned living room, sipping lemonade and listening to Sade. Sometimes the production seems to want to tip over into a full musical, with songs playing contrapuntally against the story of the Dane.

At points, the show is more of a cabaret than a narrative aimed like a dagger at the heart. The advantage of that loose approach is that each of the actors in the ensemble surrounding Blankson-Wood gets to put their own best foot forward, rather than following any strong thread of interpretation put forward by Leon. I've never felt more sympathy for the murderous Claudius than I did in this production, in which he's carved by Thompson down to hand-wringing human size. Toussaint's Gertrude is thrillingly vulnerable—her fear and guilt and trepidation are, at every point, visible in her body and audible in her speech. Daniel Pearce's Polonius becomes heartwarming comic relief, his prolix speeches running together into an anxious, often hilarious slurry. Poor Ophelia is portrayed soulfully by Pfeiffer; Laertes, Ophelia's vengeful brother, is played with admirable intensity by Nick Rehberger.

I was especially tickled by Warner Miller's take on Hamlet's dependable pal Horatio—here, he's an around-the-way guy, not easily excitable, the kind of dude who's standing on the corner when you leave for work and somewhere near the same spot when you're on your way home. You know he's had an active day, full of talk and business, but you'd never think to ask after each of his moves. If he gives you advice, you shut up and gratefully take it.

When, early on, Hamlet and Horatio are up late, looking out for Hamlet's dad's ghost, you trust that the errand isn't frivolous precisely because cool Horatio's there, taking part. When the spectre does arrive, bearing the fratricidal news of his final hour, one of the best and most focussed moments of Blankson-Wood's performance follows. Instead of using another actor to fill the father's figure, Leon shows Hamlet being possessed by his dead father—Blankson-Wood mouths the ghost's portentous speech. His slinky physicality suddenly becomes regal and strange. His eyes roll back into his head. Fire might as well be spouting from the tips of his fingers. That's another unexpected thing about grief, how it coaxes you into an attempt at becoming the other, taking on their tics and savoring how they used to talk, fishing a ring out of their jewelry box and stuffing it onto your finger—all evidence of a great hope that, by embodying those details, you might permanently save them.

Leon's interest in creating a kind of party onstage has its charms, but I ended up wishing that this production had followed the curious, perhaps narrower path laid out by Blankson-Wood's performance. As it stands, Hamlet's great monologues seem like grand but fatuous excuses for his chaotic vigilantism, not language born organically from the parallel pressures of sadness and filial loyalty.

Listening to the music of the conversations between Hamlet and Horatio, I kept thinking about the King and Queen's constant admonishments that Hamlet go abroad—he needs a bit of travel, the idea goes, to help him cool off and shake the worst of his sorrow. For the first time, I thought that his mom and stepdad might be right. I can imagine a quieter play, off to the side of Shakespeare's but doubling its themes, showing this contemporary American Hamlet on the road. He might go sleep in a friend's extra room in L.A., or seek shelter in a New England summer home, or take his black carry-on bag across the Atlantic, sowing tears like seeds in lonely hotel rooms all over Europe.

Blankson-Wood has all the goods to play that lost young man, not adrift amid sudden songs but trying to sort out the cacophony of anger and pain, recrimination and confusion, paranoia and sexual suggestion that's clanging around inside his head. He might come back even more unscrewed, but one would hope that the trip could mark a reëntry into society. The way back from the graveside to the wider world is strewn with petals fallen from the flower of love. You might need to be alone, far from your family, to bend down and gather them, one by one. ♦

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CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Jerald Lewis, must be received by Sunday, July 23rd. The finalists in the July 3rd contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the August 7th issue. Anyone age thirteen or older can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit contest.newyorker.com.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

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"

THE FINALISTS

"You don't have to say 'Excuse me' every single time."
Rob Needham, Ann Arbor, Mich.

"I had to put my wife in a bowl yesterday."
Melissa Hough, Philadelphia, Pa.

"I'm starting to wonder why we were given free movie tickets."
Kurt Markert, Ann Arbor, Mich.

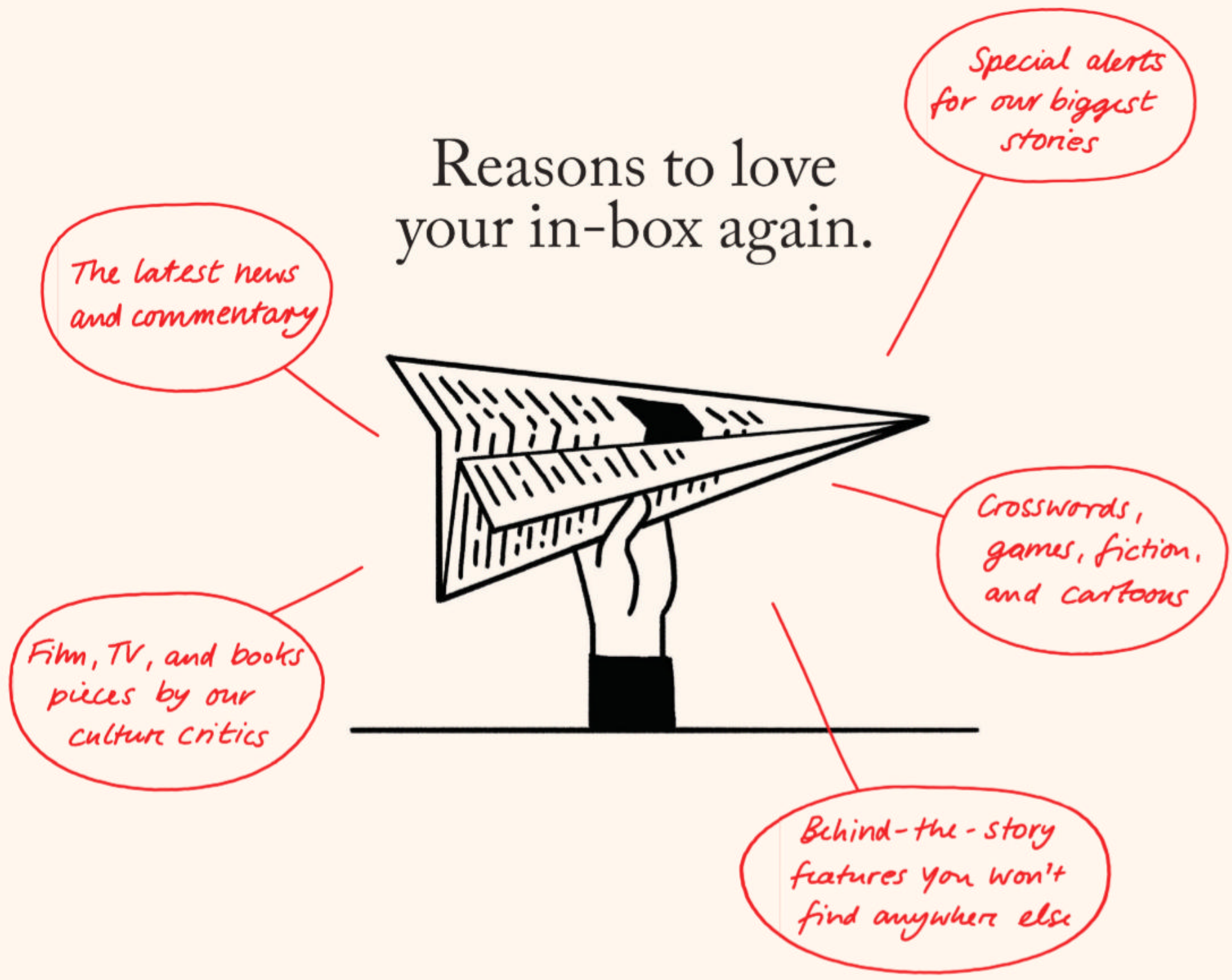
THE WINNING CAPTION

"It's synch or swim."
Andrew Workman, Renfrew, Scotland

THE NEW YORKER

The Daily

Reasons to love your in-box again.



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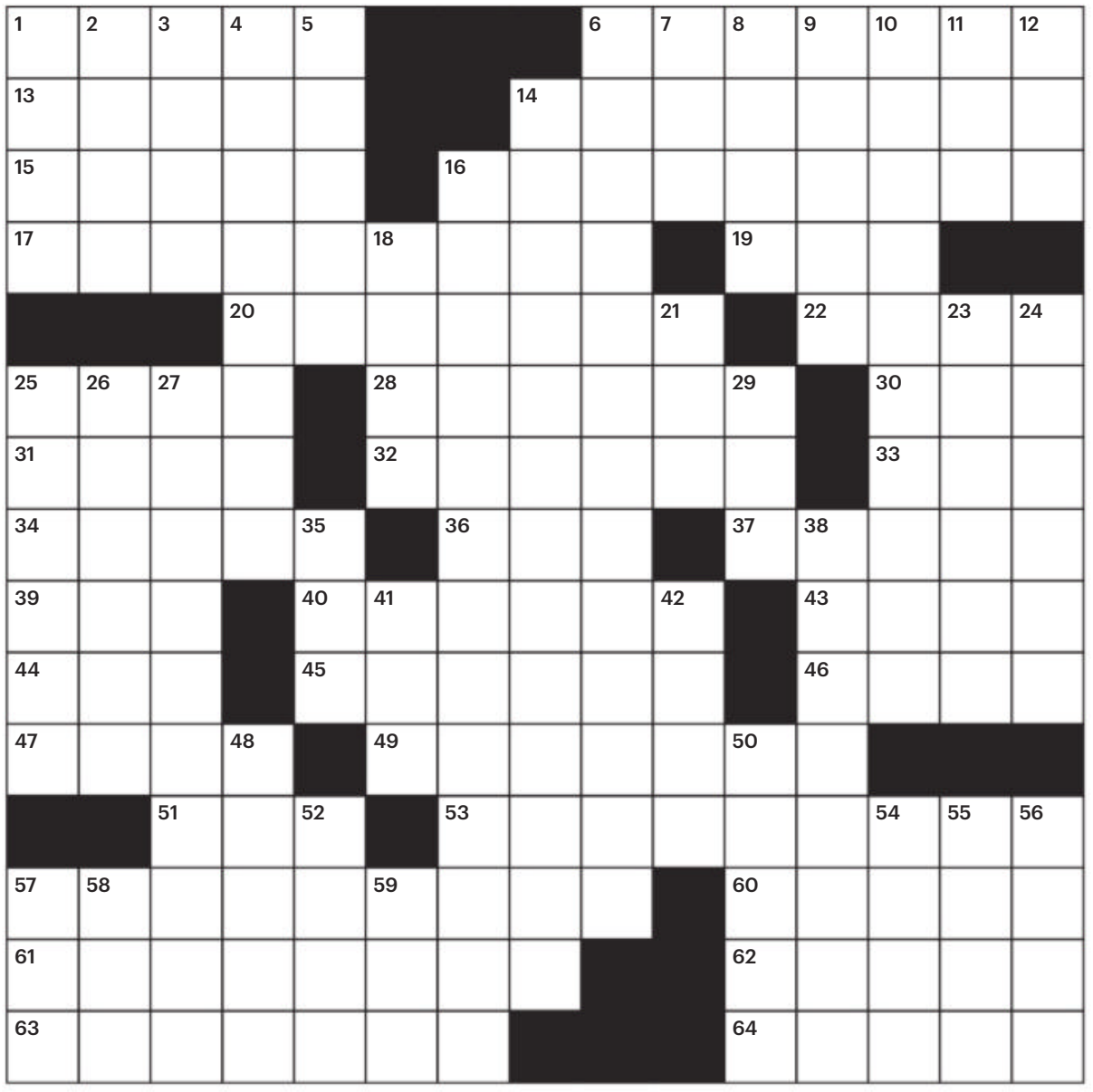
PUZZLES & GAMES DEPT.

THE CROSSWORD

A beginner-friendly puzzle.

BY ROBYN WEINTRAUB



ACROSS

1 Tremendously successful Broadway show
6 Name given to two NASA probes and a "Star Trek" series
13 More than just assertive
14 Song by Los del Río that spawned a nineties dance craze
15 "Crocodile Rock" singer ___ John
16 Errant throw from the mound that allows a base runner to advance
17 Blissful place, metaphorically
19 Lead-in to Fernando or Francisco
20 Playfully making fun of
22 ___ Ness monster
25 "___ American Life" (longtime public-radio program)
28 "In other words . . ."
30 First baseman in an Abbott and Costello routine
31 EGOT winner Moreno
32 Afternoon hike or a picnic in the park, e.g.
33 Emulate a kangaroo
34 Photo-sharing app, familiarly
36 "Acupuncture is a jab well done," for one
37 "___ pretzels are making me thirsty" ("Seinfeld" catchphrase)
39 Org. whose Seal of Acceptance can be seen on some toothpaste tubes
40 Makes a lot of noise in bed?
43 Greek god of war
44 Alternative to styling mousse
45 "I'm telling the truth!"
46 Carson's "Tonight Show" successor
47 Singer Clapton or Carmen
49 Plaything that might have yarn for hair
51 Private-jet passenger, often
53 "General Hospital" or "The Young and the Restless"
57 "It would seem that . . ."
60 Tech for identifying highway speeders
61 Unable to discern differences between musical pitches
62 Justin Timberlake's boy band
63 More incensed
64 Office aides: Abbr.

DOWN

1 Work on ___ (do freelance projects without a guarantee of payment)
2 Think (over)
3 Regarding
4 Berates
5 The Pretenders front woman Chrissie
6 Occasion for exchanging candy hearts
7 Mental-health condition often treated with exposure and response prevention: Abbr.
8 Talks incessantly
9 Sans-serif font similar to Helvetica
10 Spin one's wheels
11 Business-letter abbr. signalling that additional materials are included
12 Cheerleader's shout
14 Game that might feature windmills and moats as obstacles
16 Make your dreams come true, per Jiminy Cricket
18 Military alliance that Finland joined in 2023, for short
21 Liquor often paired with tonic
23 The ___ One (nickname for a person destined for greatness)
24 "Fingers crossed!"
25 Process of prioritizing patients
26 Get in the way of
27 Facetious reply downplaying one's fabulous and lucrative career
29 "___ Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band"
35 Fire proof?
38 What a student might need to go to the bathroom
41 Conjunction often preceded by "neither"
42 Put an end to
48 Beverage sold at some apple orchards
50 ___ Doone (cookie brand that shares its name with a character from a Victorian romance novel)
52 Piggy-pampering sesh
54 Brand that might share a shelf with Ben & Jerry's
55 Go on a tirade
56 Rainbow shapes
57 Fig. that may update based on traffic conditions
58 Captain ___ Trapp ("The Sound of Music" patriarch)
59 Word before a maiden name

Solution to the previous puzzle:

S	O	F	T	C	■	S	T	A	T	■	■	T	R	L
M	R	B	I	G	■	L	I	T	H	E	■	R	O	E
S	C	I	F	I	C	O	N	V	E	N	T	I	O	N
■	■	■	F	A	N	T	A	S	Y	D	R	A	F	T
E	G	O	■	R	E	S	■	■	T	O	I	L	E	T
L	O	V	E	T	T	■	W	A	H	■	■	S	R	O
S	A	U	D	I	■	M	A	N	E	T	S	■	■	■
■	■	M	Y	S	T	E	R	Y	M	E	A	T	■	■
■	■	■	S	T	I	G	M	A	■	E	N	A	C	T
R	O	T	■	■	G	A	S	■	E	N	D	U	R	E
E	L	A	P	S	E	■	■	G	O	V	■	T	U	X
W	E	S	T	E	R	N	U	N	I	O	N	■	■	■
R	O	M	A	N	C	E	L	A	N	G	U	A	G	E
A	L	A	■	T	U	R	N	T	■	U	L	C	E	R
P	E	N	■	■	B	O	A	S	■	E	L	E	N	A

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